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THE Nation.

RED DAWN

ELECTION 2010

ON WOMEN
BETSY REED

ON THE TEA PARTY
RICHARD KIM

ON THE STATES
JOHN NICHOLS

ON TOM PERRIELLO
CHRIS HAYES

ON WHAT'S NEXT
THE EDITORS

NOVEMBER 22, 2010
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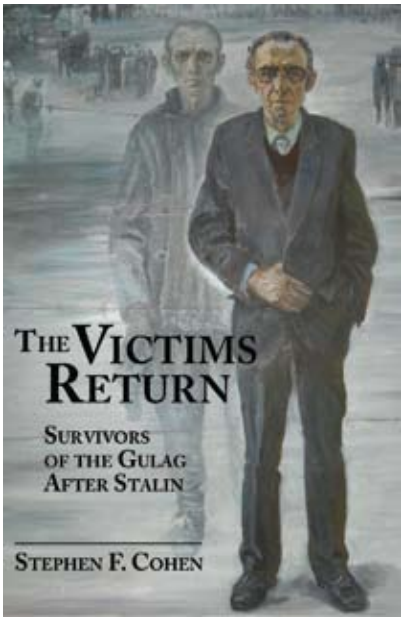

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Letters

Do Mama Grizzlies Sit in the Woods?

Redwood Valley, Calif.
Interesting parenthetic phrase in Betsy Reed's "Sex and the GOP" [Oct. 18]: "If it were up to men, Palin might very well become president in 2012 (if it were up to white men, she'd be a shoo-in)." Yes, but had it been up to white women, John McCain and You-Know-Who would be our prez and veep right now, since white women favored that swell ticket roughly 54 to 46 percent. It's possible that white women think they have the most cultural capital to lose, as our perishing Republic struggles with equality across all social lines. It's certain that if women of color sit out this election, white heat will have burned President Obama's coattails.
Jonathan Middlebrook

Santa Rosa, Calif.
OK, OK—I don't so much object to the yucky story, but the girlie cartoons on the cover—c'mon, gimme a break. Being funny is one thing; we can use humor. Being sickening we don't need.
Millie Barnet

Minneapolis
As a contributor to the Dump Bachmann blog (dumpbachmann.com), I would have preferred a story about Michele Bachmann's pardon letter for Petters Ponzi associate and top donor Frank Vennes Jr.; or her acceptance of $10,000 from the operator of the sham Navy Veterans Association charity; or her support for bizarre homophobic radio preacher Bradlee Dean and for a crackpot pod transport scheme.
Ken Avidor

Sexual Freedom vs. License

Portland, Ore.
The next time Katha Pollitt runs into a young feminist who is unable to articulate how and when stripping, prostitution and porn are troubling versus perfectly OK versus both, direct her to a feminist expert on the sacrosanctity of sexual freedom regardless of gender: Betty Dodson, Susie Bright, Gayle Rubin, Nina Hartley, Carol Queen, just to name a few ["Subject to Debate," Oct. 18]. Dan Savage is an indispensable source of knowledge and rational thinking about all things sex-related. Mistress Matisse is another articulate blogger and columnist. Her February 10, 2009, post on why she both is and is not a feminist should be required reading.

And please, please, please direct that young feminist to organizations actually run by the women (and men) who strip, trick, star in or produce porn. You can't think about an issue without listening to the people most affected by that issue. Flip comments and vague thinking about sex work should be countered with concrete experience. To that end, *$pread* magazine, by and for sex workers, is an excellent resource. This all-volunteer publication could use more subscribers, and it is the most articulate resource I've read on the troubling/perfectly OK aspects of stripping, prostitution and porn.
Marilyn Cuberle

Asses on the March

Oakland Park, Fla.
Ari Berman's "Herding Donkeys" [Oct. 18], on the battle between grassroots activists and Beltway insiders, makes for great reading, but his point of view suffers from the same Washington-centric attitudes he attributes to the Democratic Party. His characterization of Organizing for America as a purely top-down group, imposing a White House agenda on the grassroots, is unfair and misleading.

In Broward County, Florida, the local OFA rallied the Democratic base in support of Congressman Ron Klein, gubernatorial candidate Alex Sink and Senate candidate Kendrick Meek, as well as for candidates for the state legislature. The county Democratic Party is notably absent, which goes to show that not all grassroots are the same.
Robert Muniz

letters@thenation.com

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Stand and Fight

There's no disguising it—the results of the midterm elections were, with a few exceptions, grim, as candidates who are intent on rolling back decades of economic and social progress

EDITORIAL

were swept into office. But this is no time to despair. It is time to stand and fight for a real debate about ideas and for small-d democracy.

This was an unearned win for the Republican Party. The election was overwhelmingly about the lousy economy and high unemployment, and Democrats paid the price as voters expressed their discontent with the party in power. Conservatives of both parties are just plain wrong to claim the vote represented an ideological shift to the right.

The quickly congealing conventional wisdom claims that President Obama tried to do too much and was too liberal. Wrong. The reality is that the administration and conservative Democrats were too timid in tackling the dire economic crisis inherited from George W. Bush. The public was alienated not because of Obama's overreaching but because his team hasn't fought aggressively enough against well-funded and entrenched interests. For thirty years the working and middle classes have seen their incomes stagnate as the top 1 percent have accrued a staggering percentage of the nation's wealth. By rescuing instead of reforming the big banks, the White House economic team, led by Wall Street–tainted Larry Summers and Tim Geithner, ceded populist energy to the Tea Party and its corporate funders. The inadequacy of the president's recovery program, largely a result of concessions to the GOP, became a political and economic catastrophe for the White House.

In the end, the Democrats suffered because the anemic economy hasn't been generating enough jobs—and the president failed to convince voters he was piloting a consistent course that would turn things around. Furthermore, the absence of a forceful and sustained explanation of how conservative policies have failed and will continue to fail enabled a right-wing narrative of empty slogans, fearmongering and outright mendacity to gain traction. Obama's decision to abandon his smart argument about building a new foundation for the economy and his premature embrace of deficit reduction only left voters confused about the White House's program for recovery.

The president must lay out a clear and bold plan to create jobs, jobs and more jobs and get the economy going—and fight with conviction for those plans against anyone standing in the way. He should take the advice of the more than 300 economists who have urged his administration not to focus prematurely on deficit reduction. Joining the GOP embrace of Social Security and Medicare cuts and meanspirited austerity makes for bad policy and bad politics. The Democrats should fight for sensible investments, especially in infrastructure, green-energy initiatives and research and development. Obama should suspend his National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform, which has laid out an unrealistic and counterproductive proposal to reduce the federal deficit to 3 percent of GDP by 2015.

The president might consider the dramatic use of executive power to rebuild the economy. This would be smart politics, as it would energize key and core constituencies. And it wouldn't hurt if the White House fused a bold economic program with a clear, concrete and, yes, passionate message. Maybe it's time for the first lady—who spoke so powerfully on the stump in the election's final weeks—to

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explain to her husband that bloodless, analytical detachment just doesn't cut it. Obama might also seek counsel from Elizabeth Warren, who as head of the new Consumer Financial Protection Bureau is standing with beleaguered families versus predatory banks. Robust support for Warren would convince voters that the government is not on their backs but on their side.

As he made clear in his first postelection press conference, the president remains committed to a politics of civility and common ground. Fine, but if he meets with Republican obstruction, Obama should channel Harry Truman and come out fighting against a know-nothing and do-nothing GOP. If he's determined to pursue a politics of common ground, why not define it as one of economic dignity and social justice, one that ends the corruption and special entitlements that have allowed the very richest to amass great fortunes while the vast majority of Americans struggle to make ends meet? Common ground, if it means making the government more responsive to the needs of the majority. Common ground, if it means public investment in people, in our deteriorating infrastructure, in research and development that serves human needs and rebuilds America's competitiveness in the world. Common ground, if it means ending a wasteful and destructive war in Afghanistan. Common ground, if it means campaign finance reform that levels the playing field so ordinary Americans' voices aren't drowned out by more and more covert and corporate money. And common ground, if it means listening to and remobilizing a base that is the heart and soul of a renewed and revived Democratic Party. A rising American electorate—young people, Latinos, African-Americans, single women, union members—would be an effective counterweight to the assaults of an emboldened GOP and its corporate funders.

The extremist GOP may have won control of the House, but it does not have a mandate to dismantle government. According to many polls, majorities across party lines want government to work, and they support a range of reforms to protect them against economic hardship and the marketplace. That includes retirement security, education, consumer protection, investment in infrastructure—but not tax cuts for the rich, subsidies for companies that offshore US jobs, elimination of the Education Department or privatization of Social Security and Medicare.

The nation confronts urgent problems. It is still in the throes of an economic crisis. Poverty and inequality are growing, the middle class is shrinking. President Obama should seize the moment to show that he is committed to standing with Americans who have been shafted. This is not a time to retreat. This is a time for the politics of conviction that Obama has said he believes in. Yes you can, Mr. President.

Tea Party Takeaways

In the first and signal victory speech of election night, Kentucky Senator-elect Rand Paul took to the podium and declared himself the leading edge of a "Tea Party tidal wave." That wave, Paul made clear, is poised to crash

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Noted.

SALUTE TO RUSS: Wisconsin progressive **Russ Feingold** did not lose his Senate seat because he was the only senator to oppose the **Patriot Act**, or because he was the first senator to call for timelines to bring the troops home from Iraq and Afghanistan, or because he was the Senate's most consistent opponent of job-killing free-trade deals. And he certainly did not lose because he was one of the few Democrats to vote against the Wall Street bailout of 2008.

The man who beat Feingold, Republican millionaire **Ron Johnson**, did not spend much of his vast campaign budget on ads addressing those issues. Rather, Johnson attacked Feingold for backing Obama's stimulus bill and healthcare reform legislation. Johnson's bogus claim was that Feingold was just a cookie-cutter Democrat who followed the party line. This was disproved by studies showing that Feingold was one of the most independent members of the Senate, and one of the few who consistently challenged presidents of both parties on constitutional and economic issues.

But in a hyperpartisan political moment, Feingold struggled to be heard by independent voters who had traditionally supported him. He made the race far closer than the polls suggested it would be. But this was the year of Sarah Palin's faux mavericks—not the sort of old-school men and women of principle whose tradition Feingold maintained for eighteen years. In the end, money and negative ads robbed our country of one of the handful of senators who proudly wore the label "progressive." JOHN NICHOLS

BLUE ISLAND: Before the 2004 election, Republicans controlled almost every lever of power in Colorado: the governor's mansion, both Senate seats, five of seven Congressional districts and both state houses. After the 2008 election, that power imbalance was reversed, with Democrats triumphing in this rapidly changing purple state. Republicans were supposed to take control again this year, but Colorado proved to be "a Democratic island in a GOP storm," as the **Denver Post** put it.

Democrats easily held the governor's mansion (Denver Mayor **John Hickenlooper** prevailed over Constitution candidate **Tom Tancredo** and Republican **Don Maes**), narrowly retained the Senate seat of **Michael Bennet** and limited their House losses to two. Colorado is a classic example of Tea Party overreach, where Republicans squandered their chances by nominating extremists like Maes and Ken Buck. Voters also rejected three tax-slashing ballot measures, an initiative to block the implementation of healthcare reform and an antichoice proposal to define a fetus as "personhood." On a terrible night for Democrats, rays of hope still flickered out West. ARI BERMAN

BEYOND PROP 19: For drug policy reformers, the cascade of losses on November 2 was curiously invigorating. Fifty-four percent of California voters rejected **Prop 19**, which would have legalized the use and sale of recreational pot, and medical marijuana initiatives went down in Arizona, Oregon and South Dakota. But amid defeat was the growing conviction that larger victories lie ahead. Thanks to a well-run grassroots campaign, ample funding and widespread media attention, the liberalization of drug policy has emerged as a mainstream issue with broad appeal—particularly among young voters, 64 percent of whom supported Prop 19. Although reform advocates didn't tip the balance this fall, they're already geared up to push for similar ballot measures in 2012. As top legalization proponent **Richard Lee** noted, "We will be coming back, stronger than ever." MARK SORKIN

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY LOST: Nearly 60 percent of Arizona voters approved **Prop 107**, amending the state Constitution to ban "granting preferential treatment to or discrimination against any person or group on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin." While Prop 107 has largely been referred to as a ban on affirmative action in Arizona's public universities, what many have failed to note is that it is already illegal for the state's public universities to use a quota system. What Prop 107 *does* threaten is equal opportunity programs that are available to Arizonans once they have been admitted based on merit. Programs like Arizona State University's **Native American Summer Institute** and the University of Arizona's **Women in Science and Engineering** program may lose funding or disappear. KATE MURPHY

IOWA INJUSTICE: Still incensed by the Iowa Supreme Court's unanimous 2009 decision to legalize same-sex marriage, conservative groups led by the **National Organization for Marriage** (NOM) mounted a successful campaign to dismiss three pro-equality justices. It was the first time since 1962 that a statute allowing for "retention votes" was used, and the justices were ill equipped to fend off a barrage of television ads. **Marsha Ternus**, ousted along with her colleagues **Michael Streit** and **David Baker**, released a statement decrying the "unprecedented attack by out-of-state special interest groups."

The outcome appeared more a result of manipulating a previously apolitical process than Iowans' desire to carry out a homophobic vendetta: Attorney General **Thomas Miller**, who favors same-sex marriage and declined to pre-empt the court's ruling last year, was re-elected. While that is somewhat reassuring, nevertheless, says **Evan Wolfson**, executive director of **Freedom to Marry**, "this is a reminder that the antigay agenda of groups like NOM is not just antigay but part of a several-decades long struggle against bedrock American principles like the independent judiciary." MICHAEL TRACEY

BALLOT BOWL: Ballot initiative threats to the environment in California and to healthcare reform in three other states produced mixed results on election night. **Prop 23**, a measure that would have suspended green law AB 32 until unemployment falls below 5.5 percent, failed to pass. Good news also came in the passage of **Prop 25**, a law declaring that the state budget in California no longer requires a supermajority to pass, allowing money for crucial legislation to move forward. However, this progress was tainted by the approval of **Prop 26**. New taxes will need a supermajority, and the definition of what constitutes a tax will be altered to include some of what are currently referred to as fees, which often include environmental charges for polluting businesses. **Health Care Freedom Acts**, designed to counter Obama's healthcare reforms, passed in Oklahoma and Arizona but failed in Colorado. JENNIFER O'MAHONY

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down on the very idea of government itself. In his compact, loaded address, Paul pilloried government on at least ten occasions while zipping through the Tea Party's trigger words: Constitution, individual liberty, freedom, entrepreneurship, capitalism, balanced budgets and an end to the slavery of debt.

COMMENT

But there was one word conspicuously missing from his remarks: "Republican."

On a night when Republicans pulled off the largest shift in party power since 1938, converting at least sixty seats in the House, they also seemed, paradoxically, to be an endangered species. In absurd remarks coming from a ten-term incumbent, incoming House speaker John Boehner pointedly declined to acknowledge this elephant in the room, pledging instead to take "a new approach that hasn't been tried before in Washington—by either party." And when the R-word was uttered, it was usually in a bizarre ritual of self-flagellation. As victorious Florida Tea Partyer Marco Rubio bluntly declared, it would be "a grave mistake" to believe that "these results are somehow an embrace of the Republican Party."

If the GOP didn't win—according to the GOP—then just who the hell did? The expedient answer for a party that still can't shake off the stink of George W. Bush's crony capitalism and profligate wars is the Tea Party. As a branding technique, it allows the right to sell a narrative of rediscovered conservatism, a story of how a movement of libertarian true believers got lost in the corridors of Halliburton and the quagmires of Afghanistan and Iraq but found their way again thanks to an uprising of "the people" awakened by Obama's government takeover. A lot of inconvenient truths and players get dropped along the way (pro-war security hawks; Astroturf-seeding billionaires; the Christian right, whose definition of individual liberty doesn't extend to women and gays; Bush's Wall Street bailout), but obviously historical and factual integrity isn't really the point. It makes a good slogan, and along the way it ups the rhetorical ante. Reagan's small-government revolution now sounds like a full-fledged no-government revolt; not since the British Redcoats has an army come to Washington with so explicit an intent to burn it to the ground.

Underneath the "Tea Party Triumphs" headlines, however, lies a fractured, incoherent party whose short-term strategy for electoral success is every bit as dicey as the formula for New Coke. Paul's, Rubio's and Pat Toomey's wins were more than offset by defeats for Christine O'Donnell, Sharron Angle, John Raese, Ken Buck and, most likely, Joe Miller. Likewise in the House, Tea Party candidates picked up victories in Arizona, Arkansas and Florida, but in Pennsylvania, a hotbed of local Tea Party activism, they went 0 for 2 in races in play while non–Tea Party Republicans went a perfect 5 for 5. Although you wouldn't know it from the media coverage, ordinary Republicans constitute the majority of the new GOP class. Moreover, a number of successful candidates are only nominally or opportunistically associated with the Tea Party; these TINOs (Tea in Name Only) include Ron Johnson, who knocked off Russ Feingold in Wisconsin but whose success was largely driven by his personal wealth, and Steve Chabot of Ohio, who rebranded himself early on as a Tea Partyer in order to reclaim a seat he first won in 1994.

So far, the Tea Party zealots haven't forced most of these TINOs and non-Tea Republicans to take the purity test, as they did with Mike Castle in Delaware, to disastrous effect. But if firebrands like Paul and Rubio get their way in crafting legislation, all bets are off. Ask newly elected moderate Republican Nan Hayworth of New York's 19th District how she feels about privatizing Social Security or eliminating the Department of Education. Then ask Senators Susan Collins and Olympia Snowe how they feel about their new colleague Toomey, who thinks it's cool to jail doctors for performing abortions. The possibilities for wedge issues that highlight the antigovernment extremism of the Tea Party (as well as its religious right tendencies) are ample, and Democrats should have no qualms about exploiting them—if the Tea Party doesn't go there on its own.

But there's a bigger lesson for Democrats than just divide and conquer. As much as the Tea Party's "throw the bums out" mentality represents a scary, anti-intellectual nihilism—there's an undeniably refreshing zing to its claim that Washington needs new faces. Sure, there's tons of hypocrisy and insincerity when folks like Boehner mouth these anti-establishment lines. But at least he had the smarts to ape the mood and in some cases actually accommodate it. The Republican Party wrestled this past year—often bloodily and clumsily (just ask Lisa M-U-R-K-O-W-S-K-I)—to co-opt, absorb and redirect the new energy on their side. This intraparty fight resulted in considerable blowback, though on the whole it produced not just net gains in Congress but the perception (and sometimes reality) that the Republicans were the party most willing to create a place at the table for outsiders. Meanwhile, Democrats, who just two years ago put a greenhorn at the top of the ticket, doubled down this time on the familiar—rallying around Blanche Lincoln in Arkansas (who subsequently went down to a 20-point defeat) and funneling late money to Blue Dogs (who dropped from fifty-four to twenty-six members). For the better part of Obama's administration, staffers like Rahm Emanuel and Robert Gibbs were busy tossing off insults and elbows to the few insurgents on the left. And look where that got us.

RICHARD KIM

Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

Be Not Concerned That Two Conservative Groups Spent $50 Million on This Election

Deciding *Citizens United*,
Five strict constructionists did find
That massive secret corporate funding
Was what the framers had in mind.

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Mama Grizzlies Die Hard

COMMENT

As doleful Democrats survey the wreckage left by the 2010 midterms, one sight is at least slightly cheering: Sarah Palin's Mama Grizzlies licking their wounds. Sharron Angle, Carly Fiorina and Christine O'Donnell were supposed to lead a "stampede of pink elephants" to shake up Washington. Instead, "Democrats are holding the Senate because these Republican women were just too conservative for their states," observes Debbie Walsh of the Rutgers Center for American Women and Politics.

This result should not come as a huge surprise, given that the GOP Year of the Woman was always mostly hype, fueled by a potent mixture of Republican propaganda, Democratic hysteria and the mainstream media's fondness for loopy ladies (though to be fair, much of the independent media suffered from the same affliction). One of the oddities of these midterms was the inverse relationship between O'Donnell's standing in the polls and her prominence in the press: even as she trailed her Democratic rival by double digits, she was the single most covered candidate in the election, according to the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism. Only Barack Obama got more attention. In that respect, as in many others, she is truly Palinesque.

But don't count the Mama Grizzlies out. Thanks to them, there is a distinct and fascinating gender component to the rancorous divide that has emerged within the Republican Party as a result of the Tea Party insurrection. Ill treated by a GOP establishment that is almost exclusively male, women like Palin, O'Donnell and Michele Bachmann are already finding gratification in their ability to remain irksome to Karl Rove. The morning after her loss, O'Donnell lashed out at the party honchos who spurned her, suggesting that, with Rove and NRSC chair John Cornyn's support, she could have "closed the gap" and that her loss was a "symptom of Republican cannibalism." Bachmann—who founded the House Tea Party Caucus—has indicated her interest in a leadership post, which will no doubt discomfit her colleagues because of her embarrassing tendency to take their philosophies to their logical extreme (suggesting, for example, that we could solve unemployment by abolishing the minimum wage). Palin, for her part, stands center stage in the drama as the party's 2012 positioning commences—and she is not afraid to play the gender card: in response to a *Politico* piece featuring unnamed sources casting aspersions on her general election chances, titled "Next for GOP Leaders: Stopping Sarah Palin," she told Fox News, "Some within the establishment don't like the fact that I won't back down to a good-old-boys club."

All of this is admittedly fun to watch. These fractures weaken the Republican coalition. Plus, fear is a great motivator (especially when hope is in short supply), and "President Palin" is probably the most galvanizing rallying cry Democrats can muster for 2012 at the moment. But as we pass the popcorn, we might usefully reflect on what the Democrats' losses in this election cycle represent, especially in terms of women.

Perhaps alarmed by late-breaking polls threatening a female abandonment of Democrats, in the last days before the vote the White House launched an effort to tout its accomplishments on their behalf, with a white paper on women and the economy as its centerpiece. Given the level of economic anxiety racking American women, this intervention was clearly too little, too late. As economist Heather Boushey of the Center for American Progress points out, women are bearing the brunt of the job losses and budget cuts roiling the states in ways that are largely invisible in our political culture. Funding for home health aides, for example, has been slashed, meaning the thousands of women who held those jobs are jobless, and the thousands of women to whom the responsibility for caregiving falls are now weighed down with new burdens they have no choice but to bear. It's hardly strange that many of them are not feeling especially enthusiastic about politics right now.

The point Democrats should take away from this is simple: women matter. And if they aren't moved by the poignancy of women's struggles in this harsh economy, they should at least think about how their fate as a party is intertwined with that of women as a social group. The gender gap—in which women are more likely than men to favor Democrats—did persist in this election, amounting to about thirteen points in House races, according to early exit polls. But this was a decline from previous years. The drop not only reflected the same shift toward Republicans that appeared across the board but also manifested depressed turnout among women who would have voted Democratic had they gone to the polls. Where it held strongest, the gap was a key factor in wins for Democrats, helping Harry Reid overcome Sharron Angle in Nevada and carrying Michael Bennet to victory over Ken Buck in Colorado. But overall, the Democrats need to do better in wooing and turning out women if the party is to regain its footing.

By all means, Democrats and feminists should continue to rip apart the Republican Party myth that it's been born again as the party of women. That's the easy part. Restoring women's confidence in Democrats is the tougher job. BETSY REED

The Perriello Way

Charlottesville, Virginia

Capitolism

Of all the losses on election night for progressive politicians, the two that hurt most were Russ Feingold's defeat at the hands of self-funded corporate clown Ron Johnson, and Virginia Congressman Tom Perriello's loss to Republican State Senator Robert Hurt.

It's likely you've heard of Perriello because, somewhat improbably, the 36-year old Congressional freshman, who represents a district that stretches south from Charlottesville to the North Carolina border, managed to become a national progressive icon over his two-year tenure. He graced the cover of *The American Prospect*, appeared on *The Colbert Report* and, the Friday before the election, hosted a much publicized rally in Charlottesville with President Obama. Groups like the League of Conservation Voters, the National Education Association and America's Families First poured money into this race.

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End the War Threats and Support the Struggle

We, the undersigned, oppose the U.S.-led campaign to impose harsher sanctions on Iran, and the ongoing threat of war against that country. Despite Washington's claims, its policy is clearly not animated by a genuine concern for protecting the world from the threat of nuclear war; otherwise how could Washington support such nuclear-armed states as India, Israel, and Pakistan, or maintain its own huge nuclear arsenal? Nor is U.S. policy driven by the goal of defending democracy. If it were, how could the United States support brutally authoritarian regimes such as those in Saudi Arabia and Egypt?

Months after it began its recent program to sanction Iran for its nuclear activities, the United States, in a move described by *The New York Times* as "more symbolic than substantive," froze the foreign assets and denied visas to eight Iranian officials, citing their role in the post-elections crackdown. This symbolic gesture cannot obscure the fact that Washington's fundamental motivation for imposing the comprehensive sanctions aimed at Iran's nuclear program is to neutralize or eliminate a major threat to its power in the region.

In June 2009 people around the world were inspired by the courageous protests in Iran, when hundreds of thousands, possibly millions, took to the streets to demand their democratic rights. Since then the Iranian government has tried to repress the movement: hundreds of political prisoners remain behind bars, often tortured, deprived of medical care, and forced to live under dangerously unhealthy conditions. We support those who struggle for democracy and social justice inside Iran.

Far from helping the Iranian people, sanctions and war threats strengthen Ahmadinejad's regime, helping it to shift the blame for worsening economic conditions from itself entirely onto the external enemy. In the past the Iranian elite has proven able to circumvent sanctions, but if Washington actually succeeds in preventing Tehran from importing refined petroleum, exporting oil and other items, and conducting normal trade and banking activities, over time millions of ordinary Iranians will suffer.

We don't want Iran, or any other country, including our own, to have nuclear weapons. But even the U.S. government admits that Iran does not now possess nuclear weapons and has no imminent prospect of acquiring them. Moreover, Iran has no less right than any other nation to develop civilian nuclear power. Many of us oppose the use of nuclear energy by any country, both for environmental reasons and because of its link to nuclear weapons — but that is not the issue in the present U.S.-Iran confrontation. The United States, a major producer of nuclear energy and by far the leading nuclear weapons nation, which continually upgrades its own conventional and nuclear arsenal and tolerates the possession of nuclear weapons by other reckless and aggressive powers, has no moral legitimacy when it tries to punish Iran for its nuclear activities.

U.S. belligerence — its continual warnings that "all options remain on the table," possibly including acceptance of an Israeli attack — only creates strong inducements for Tehran to seek nuclear weapons for its defense, or to become, like Japan, "nuclear-weapons capable," i.e. possessing all the elements necessary to make a bomb without actually manufacturing one. And it's not just Iran: U.S. militarism has helped to create a Hobbesian world in which more and more countries come to believe that their survival depends on nuclear "deterrence."

The United States can best reduce the danger of nuclear war by taking major steps to divest *itself* of nuclear weapons as part of a new, democratic and socially just foreign policy. This would include initiating both nuclear and conventional

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Sanctions Program Against Iran for Democracy Inside Iran

disarmament, encompassing missile "defense" as well as more obviously offensive weaponry; ending its predatory wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan; supporting a Nuclear-Free Weapons Zone in the Middle East; giving real support to Palestinian rights rather than continuing one-sided support to Israel; and dismantling its more than 1,000 military bases around the world. Such steps would help undermine the rationale for Iran and other countries developing their own nuclear weapons. These actions would also be the most effective way to strengthen women's, labor, and other democratic movements in the Middle East, and to promote the interests of ordinary Americans and real peace in the world.

October 2010

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Women Gathering in front of the University of Tehran. ISNA/PHOTO: AMIR KHOLOOSI

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Progressives nationwide fell for Perriello for a few reasons. First, he seemed to be one of us. Born and raised in the district, he had an eclectic background that included a Yale law degree, time in West Africa and Afghanistan working on issues of transitional justice and his founding an organization of Catholics committed to social justice. He spoke passionately and unapologetically about a society where "we love our neighbors as much as ourselves" and maintained the kind of self-deprecating humor most politicians lack. When I spoke with him earlier this year about the mood of his district and voters' distrust, he ran through a long, erudite analysis that name-checked Francis Fukuyama and Hegel before he stopped and said, "Boy, I'm a real man of the people this morning, aren't I?"

Perriello ran in 2008 pledging himself to "conviction politics" and offering a "progressive alternative" to incumbent Virgil Goode. Even though McCain won the district by three points, Perriello was able to squeak out a 745-vote victory (of more than 316,000 cast), a margin provided largely by a surge of young voters and black voters, who came out for Obama, and one of the best field operations in the country.

One thing you learn early in Washington is that the incentives there—the way fundraising works, the culture of Capitol Hill—are set up to push legislators away from a progressive vision. Which is why it turns out to matter a shocking amount whether a politician actually cares about making the country more just. The path of least resistance, particularly in a district like Perriello's, is to triangulate, distance yourself from the national party and get a seat on the Financial Services Committee so you can raise millions from the banks.

Perriello pretty much took the path of *most* resistance. On domestic issues he embraced progressive politics instead of shrinking from them. Of the forty-nine Democrats who represented districts that McCain won in 2008, Perriello was one of only five who voted for the Recovery Act, cap and trade, and healthcare reform. (On the wars, Perriello was a disappointment, voting two times to continue funding the war in Afghanistan.)

Perriello knew his votes for Obama's signature domestic legislative priorities would require him to take extra time to make his case to voters, and he focused with obsessive tenacity on local issues, particularly job creation, in a district whose population centers, other than Charlottesville, were facing double-digit unemployment even before the Great Recession. And instead of running from his record, he ran on it. During an election-morning stop at a local radio station, Perriello stressed that the healthcare legislation would allow those under 26 to stay on their parents' health insurance and therefore have the chance to continue their schooling.

On the trail he touted the hundreds of local teaching jobs and 1,800 home weatherizations paid for by the Recovery Act and his repeated votes to extend unemployment.

But starting just a few weeks after inauguration day, outside conservative groups began running ads against him in the district. As the midterms neared, Dick Armey's Americans for Prosperity spent tons of cash on local robocalls, mail drops and TV ads. They even covered the district with black November Is Coming! signs.

Perriello's opponent, Robert Hurt, seemed to take literally those "generic Republican" polls and tried to turn the race (with some success) into generic Republican versus generic Democrat. He attacked Perriello for signing on to the "Obama-Pelosi agenda," his support for an "energy tax," out-of-control spending, blah, blah, blah. He even came out against construction of the Park51 Community Center, 400 miles outside his district's lines.

As we drove from Charlottesville to Danville on election day, passing dairy farms, fall foliage and the abandoned textile mill that looms over Danville's depressed downtown, Perriello's communications director, Jessica Barba, recounted the story of several focus groups they'd run in August. The results she said, were depressing. Having decided to pay careful attention to local issues and job development, Perriello's office had been tireless in scheduling events and press releases and garnering local press coverage for every last project funded by the Recovery Act. None of it seemed to register with voters, or if it did, it was overwhelmed by the general discontent and opposition to the president.

"In polls we did on the campaign, we found he had very high numbers on 'delivered results for the district,'" Barba told me. "But we also realized he couldn't win on that message." In the end, the dynamics of a district with a motivated conservative base in a country in a justifiably dyspeptic mood just swallowed it up.

In the wake of Perriello's loss, it's tempting to conclude that conviction politics simply doesn't work. But the fate of Perriello's fellow Virginia freshman Democrat Glenn Nye suggests it's not so simple. Nye also beat a Republican incumbent in 2008, though in a district Obama won—rather than lost—by a narrow margin. But he took the opposite tack from Perriello, distancing himself from the national party and the president almost immediately, voting against cap and trade, healthcare reform, patient protection and extending unemployment. Fat lot of good it did him. He lost his race by seven more points than Perriello did.

Strange as it is to say, the lesson of election night, in Virginia and nationally, may be that Congress members' voting records don't matter all that much.

If that's the case, you might as well vote for what you think is right. The point of being in Congress isn't to get re-elected; it's to make the country better while you're there—something that seems to have been lost on so many Democrats who took the easy way out. On election night, Perriello told his supporters that his father had told him when he got into politics, "Judgment Day is more important than election day. It's more important to do what's right than what's easy.... I'm proud of what we've done and what we've accomplished."

Everything from the tenor of his voice to his wistful smile communicated that he meant it. CHRISTOPHER HAYES

The States See Red

America's political discourse has grown so Washington-centric that coverage of the 2010 elections tended to focus overwhelmingly on the fight for control of Congress and what the results would mean for President Obama. But the most dramatic play-out of the election is likely to be felt in the states, where arrangements are made to

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deliver social services, transportation policy is set and schools are funded. Forty-four states are experiencing record budget deficits, yet most now have governors and legislators who won election on promises to cut taxes and spending in ways that will leave the most vulnerable Americans in desperate straits.

The Republican wave was not merely a federal phenomenon. It swept away Democratic dominance of the states at a time when budget shortfalls demand leaders willing to make courageous and humane choices on taxes, spending and government priorities. Republicans picked up at least ten governorships and a staggering eighteen legislative chambers from the Democrats, who started Tuesday with 800 more state legislative seats (out of 7,382) than the Republicans. By the end of the day the GOP held an advantage of at least 500 seats, and their numbers were growing as the count continued. "The Republican wave in the states is perhaps even stronger than it is at the federal level," says Tim Storey, a senior fellow with the National Conference of State Legislators, who calculated that the GOP would hold more state seats than at any time since 1928.

COMMENT

It may be true that some of the new GOP governors and legislators will make the case for federal aid to ease the dire circumstance of states (the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimates they have a total deficit of $112 billion), but the money will not come easily from a House packed with new members elected on promises to slash federal spending. And that Congress could get even more Republican; the election empowered partisan cadres who will use the upcoming redistricting process to draw dozens of new GOP-friendly Congressional districts.

The picture is not entirely dark for Democrats and progressives, however. Jerry Brown's return to California's governorship was a big win for the party, as was Andrew Cuomo's election to New York's top job. The party might keep a big-state governorship in Illinois as well, but only if Democrat Pat Quinn holds on to an exceptionally narrow lead. The victory of Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper, one of the country's more innovative local leaders, over divided Republican opposition in the race for Colorado's governorship provided a rare and reassuring victory in a key Western state. Vermont State Senator Peter Shumlin's election put a Democrat in charge of Vermont for the first time since Howard Dean held the job; Shumlin is a backer of single-payer healthcare who promised to shutter the troubled Vermont Yankee nuclear power plant. And the victory of Rhode Island independent Lincoln Chafee, a former Republican senator who ran as a White House–saluted "friend" of Barack Obama, was especially encouraging, because Chafee recognizes the need to raise some taxes in order to maintain public services and schools.

There were also hopeful wins in races for powerful attorneys general posts. Activist Democrat Eric Schneiderman scored what he described as an "improbable victory" in New York over free-spending opposition from Republican and corporate interests. And it appears that San Francisco District Attorney Kamala Harris could win her state's top law-enforcement job, despite a determined effort by shadowy groups associated with GOP political czar Karl Rove to prevent the election of a Democrat who has been pegged as one of the party's rising stars.

But the bright blue spots were rare on an electoral map that went red across broad swaths of the country. The Republicans are now positioned to alter the Congressional landscape dramatically by redrawing districts that tilt toward the GOP. With total control (of governorship and both legislative chambers) of nineteen states—including Wisconsin, Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Florida, Arizona and Texas—and legislative dominance in at least three states with Democratic governors, Republicans could draw dozens of seats ripe for their party's picking in 2012. "The fight for the House continues next year," said Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour, chair of the Republican Governors Association and a potential 2012 presidential candidate.

When it comes to redistricting, the Republican gains this year create a darker scenario for Democrats than the GOP gubernatorial gains of 1994. As Chris Jankowski, executive director of the Republican State Leadership Council's REDMAP project, explained the day after the election, the 1994 gains came after that decade's redistricting process had played out. This time, says Jankowski, "it's happening going into the redistricting process, rather than in the wake of a redistricting process."

Redistricting will challenge Democrats and almost certainly require expensive court battles. Ultimately, Democrats would be wise to embrace and advance redistricting reforms, such as those proposed by Common Cause and other good-government groups. Voters like the idea of taking control of the drawing of district lines. In California they voted 61 to 39 for a state ballot proposition that expands the role of the state's Citizens Redistricting Commission, tasking the independent body—which is already involved in drawing State Assembly, State Senate and Board of Equalization district lines—with drawing Congressional district lines. Unfortunately, arguing for fairness and responsible, voter-friendly approaches may not get very far with the new leadership of most American states. JOHN NICHOLS

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Did you miss **Katrina vanden Heuvel's** *Colbert Report* appearance on election night? Watch it on TheNation.com!

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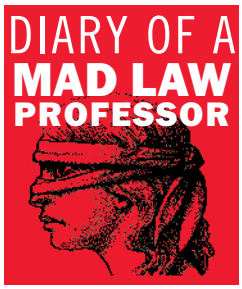
Patricia J. Williams

Veritas-iness and the American Way

Long before I knew the name Descartes, my grandmother rocked me to sleep with one better: "I am, therefore we are." That would have been my sign for the Stewart-Colbert Rally to Restore Sanity: *Sum Ergo Sumus*. Would have been, because during my long trip from Boston to Washington, I got tangled in meditations about whether Latin philosophical enfrillments would appear amusing or pretentious, witty or elitist. Would *Sum Ergo Sumus* be broadcast in Wasilla, where Levi Johnston is apparently running for mayor?

On the one hand, I was blessed with a feisty, funny, clever grandmother who would have seen humor in my co-optation of her lullaby—she might even have been proud. Back when the United States led the world in academic achievement, I went to a great public school where I was privileged to study Latin for six years, plus another two years in college. I was lucky enough to attend law school. *Res ipsa loquitur*.



Sadly, American education has suffered a miserable decline since those days. According to the Programme for International Student Assessment, we are fifteenth in reading literacy, twenty-first in science literacy and twenty-fifth in math literacy. This slide was largely accomplished by a calculated disinvestment in public education that began with the anti-tax movement of the late 1970s. California, where that movement began with a series of ballot initiatives, had one of the best school systems in the world. It now ranks almost dead last here, just above Mississippi.

There's a curious tension in politics between the popular hunger for better schooling and widespread resentment of those who actually find it. Glenn Beck and Sarah Palin have built a movement around the felt dispossession of those who don't read newspapers, whose spelling is nonstandard and who cite Shakespeare to "refudiate" book-learning. Beck, who sniffs that public schools should be abolished altogether, exploits this ambivalence brilliantly by establishing his online Beck University, whose basic courses are Faith 101, 102 and 103; Hope 101, 102 and 103; and Charity 101, 102 and 103. Yet Beck U. also has a coat of arms with a numbingly lofty motto: *Tyrannis Seditio, Obsequium Deo*.

On the morning of the Rally to Restore Sanity, I ended up grabbing a taxi and told the driver I wanted to go to the Mall, please. He took me to the nearest shopping mall, where I procured a venti mocha latte from the drive-through Starbucks, while gently setting him straight. Oh yes, this was a march for latte-loving yuppie nerds like me. While Stewart and Colbert expressly appealed to "the busy majority" of reasonable, middle-of-the-road, somewhat-stressed-but-not-given-to-hysterics people, the signs among the masses were deeply inflected by class consciousness and the national educational divide. Some were relatively subtle: Which Way to Whole Foods? and Anyone for Scrabble Later? Others more overtly referenced Beck's Rally to Restore Honor: Every Word on This Sign Is Spelled Correctly; I ❤ Evidence-Based Policies; and my favorite: If You Don't Believe in Government Perhaps You Shouldn't Run for It.

This was a crowd that listens to NPR (Kiss Me, Nina Totenberg!). It was racially and ethnically diverse (Fox Told Me I Am a Terrorist). Their humor was sophisticated (I Clutch My Purse When I See Juan Williams Coming). It was a throng of *New York Times* readers who eat bagels and peruse the *Book Review*. They marched with Kindles in hand, and their Patagonia backpacks contained novels by Anna Quindlen and essay collections like David Rakoff's *Don't Get Too Comfortable: The Indignities of Coach Class, The Torments of Low Thread Count, The Never-Ending Quest for Artisanal Olive Oil and Other First World Problems*.

If this sounds like a litany of class markers, we need to remember that class and education are not necessary correlates. This was a population of very diverse Americans who equate political sanity with studiousness and curiosity. It was a gathering of people fluent in subtlety and satire, tolerance and tact; who saw similarity in differences and differences among the similar; who appreciated metaphors, analogical thinking and the discipline of data. This is the opposite of fundamentalism. And it ought to be the very essence of American identity, for we can have no broad civic culture without it. Unfortunately these critical capacities are also the hallmarks of a good liberal arts education, which is increasingly unavailable to any but the very well-off. (The State University of New York, Albany, just announced that it may eliminate its Latin, French, Italian, Russian and theater degree programs.)

Why bother with the nuances of analytical thought? Consider this—recently State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley tweeted: "Happy birthday President #Ahmadinejad. Celebrate by sending Josh Fattal and Shane Bauer home" and "Your 54th year was full of lost opportunities. Hope in your 55th year you will open #Iran to a different relationship with the world." Sarah Palin tweeted back: "Happy B'day Ahmadinejad wish sent by US Govt. Mind boggling foreign policy: kowtow & coddle enemies; snub allies. Obama Doctrine is nonsense." This is not merely a lack of irony; it is a form of illiteracy, the kind of flat, childish reading that grasps the basic meaning of each word but not what they mean together.

We of the Kindle-toting tribe must take no solace in snobbery or superiority at moments like that. Rather, we must join in the recognition that this national crisis of flat readership hobbles everyone. To us all—Tea Partyers and Obamanistas alike—I commend the words of Servius Sulpicius, in a letter to Cicero in 45 BC: *Denique noli te oblivisci Ciceronem esse et eum qui aliis consueris praecipere et dare consilium, neque imitari malos medicos, qui in alienis morbis profitentur tenere se medicinae scientiam, ipsi se curare non possunt*. (Or, "Wise up, buddy, and practice what you preach.") ■

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Eric Alterman

You Are Only Coming Through in Waves

What a weird election. For all the hysteria, Barack Obama is still pretty much the most popular practicing politician in America, and his polls remain roughly where two-termers Bill Clinton and Ronald Reagan were during their first midterm elections. What's more, a recent *New York Times* poll found that while Obama's approval rating remains stuck around 43 percent among registered voters, about 60 percent of those polled say they are optimistic about the second half of his term and almost 70 percent predict the current downturn will be temporary. Rather amazingly, fewer than 10 percent blamed Obama and company for the economic problems, with the vast majority laying the blame where it belongs, on Wall Street and the Bush White House occupant. So why all the fuss?

Well, this being America, a great deal of easily exploitable ignorance is fueling the fire. Obama's healthcare reform, his financial reform, the stimulus, the saving of the auto industry, etc. make these two years among the most consequential in the past half-century. Yet according to a recent poll published in *Politico*, only 23 percent of respondents thought Congress accomplished more than usual, and a *New York Times*/CBS News poll found that fewer than 10 percent of Americans knew they'd gotten a tax cut, while three times that number were under the misimpression that their tax bite had gotten bigger. And how is it, one might fairly ask, that a 47-42 plurality told Bloomberg pollsters that they support a repeal of the healthcare reform law, but three-quarters of the very same people support a ban on insurance companies denying coverage based on pre-existing conditions, 67 percent support allowing children up to age 26 to stay on their parents' policies and 73 percent want to keep more prescription drug benefits for those on Medicare? Um, these are the primary provisions of the law you people say you oppose. Hello?

It's easy to fall back on clichés. Voters expect too much from our political system. (Mike DeGasperis, a laid-off steelworker from Martins Ferry, Ohio, told a *New York Times* reporter, "We heard everything was going to change, but there hasn't been much change and the unemployment is still bad and the area we live in is still really depressed.") People have no sense of history. (Franklin Roosevelt was being pushed from the left by a genuine mass movement; Barack Obama is facing the opposite.)

Administration officials can console themselves with any number of such excuses. They did what was "right" instead of what was popular. As Obama told the *Times*'s Peter Baker, "There is probably a perverse pride in my administration—and I take responsibility for this; this was blowing from the top—that we were going to do the right thing, even if short-term it was unpopular."

One can pick out the mistakes as one prefers. For instance, doing healthcare first, instead of financial reform, was clearly a miscalculation. But the biggest problem with this administration has been its refusal to recognize reality. Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell recently told *National Journal*, "The single most important thing we want to achieve is for President Obama to be a one-term president." Nobody should be surprised. According to then-Republican Arlen Specter, before "the ink was dry on the oath of office," the Republican caucus was plotting how to defeat Obama in 2012. And Senator Jim DeMint famously promised healthcare reform could be used to "break" Obama from day one.

And yet Obama never admitted this. Faced with a media establishment that treats Fox News as, well, "news" and considers Newt Gingrich a genuine sage, Obama bought into the Beltway pretense that Republicans were acting in good faith and that it was those pesky liberals who needed to be kept in line. Liberals were "fucking retarded," said Rahm Emanuel, who apologized to retarded people but not to liberals. "They will be satisfied when we have Canadian healthcare and we've eliminated the Pentagon. That's not reality," added Press Secretary Robert Gibbs. And Obama himself joshed, at a $30,000 per person fundraiser at (yes) Rich Richman's house in Greenwich, Connecticut, "Gosh, we haven't yet brought about world peace and—[*laughter*]. I thought that was going to happen quicker." As if on cue, a *Washington Post* pundit said he was "proud of the president for…shaking the left by its shoulders, begging it to recognize how good they have it." Sun Tzu warned in *The Art of War*, "If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat." MSM pundits claim to be perplexed by Obama's ability to "lose by winning." Sun Tzu wouldn't be.

* * *

My relationship with Ted Sorensen was largely social and professional, rather than personal, so I was much honored by his appearance on a panel discussion marking the launch of my book *Why We're Liberals* in 2008, sponsored by the Brennan Center. I would note, however, particularly on the fiftieth anniversary of John Kennedy's election to the presidency, that in 1952, when Kennedy had just made it to the Senate, both he and Henry "Scoop" Jackson courted 24-year-old Sorensen to be their principal aide. Jackson was considered to be the more liberal legislator at the time, and young, politically inclined lawyers did not come any more liberal than Sorensen. But after mulling over both offers, Sorensen picked Kennedy because, he explained in his memoir, Kennedy offered him a real opportunity "to serve." To those of us who admire Kennedy most of all for the inspirational rhetoric he offered the nation—as well as his remarkably cool head during the Cuban missile crisis—one has to be honest and admit that these gifts would likely have been in considerably shorter supply without Sorensen by his side. Ted was a liberal's liberal. And we are a better, fairer and indeed richer nation for that service to his friend, his president… and to us. ■

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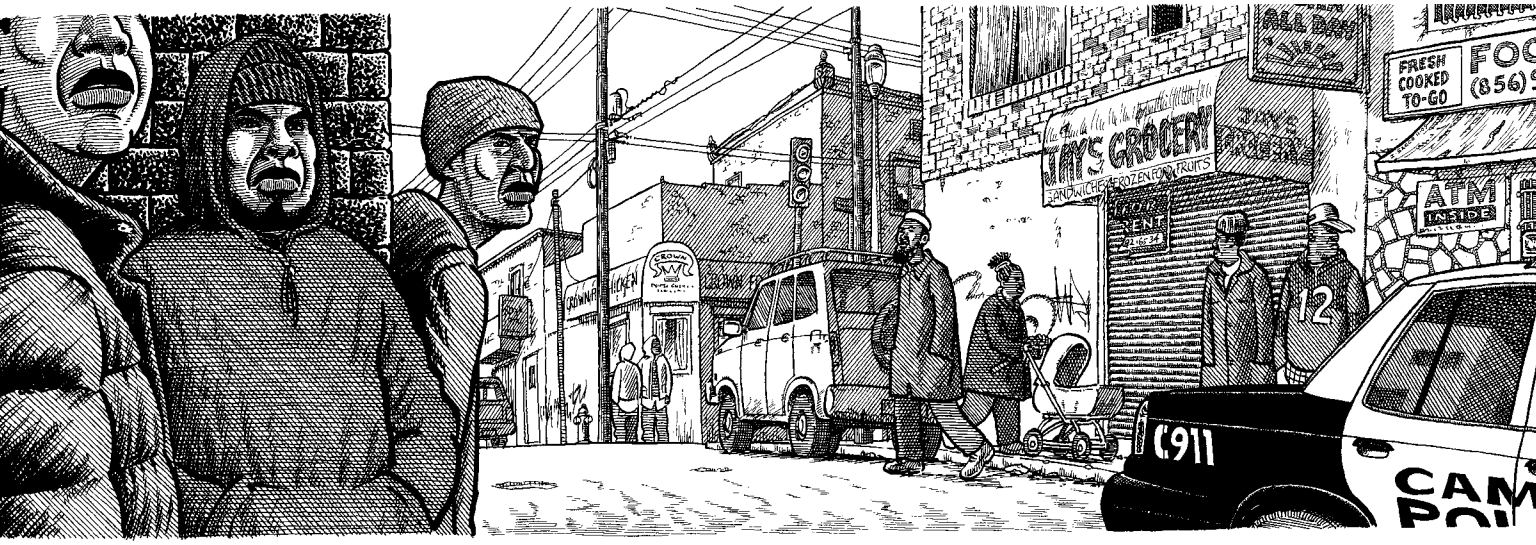

City of Ruins

Camden, New Jersey, stands as a warning of what huge pockets of America could turn into.

by CHRIS HEDGES | art by JOE SACCO

Camden, New Jersey, with a population of 70,390, is per capita the poorest city in the nation. It is also the most dangerous. The city's real unemployment—hard to estimate, since many residents have been severed from the formal economy for generations—is probably 30–40 percent. The median household income is $24,600. There is a 70 percent high school dropout rate, with only 13 percent of students managing to pass the state's proficiency exams in math. The city is planning $28 million in draconian budget cuts, with officials talking about cutting 25 percent from every department, including layoffs of nearly half the police force. The proposed slashing of the public library budget by almost two-thirds has left the viability of the library system in doubt.

Camden is where those discarded as human refuse are dumped, along with the physical refuse of postindustrial America. A sprawling sewage treatment plant on forty acres of riverfront land processes 58 million gallons of wastewater a day for Camden County. The stench of sewage lingers in the streets. There is a huge trash-burning plant that releases noxious clouds, a prison, a massive cement plant and mountains of scrap metal feeding into a giant shredder. The city is scarred with several thousand decaying abandoned row houses; the skeletal remains of windowless brick factories and gutted gas stations; overgrown vacant lots filled with garbage and old tires; neglected, weed-filled cemeteries; and boarded-up store fronts.

Corruption is rampant, with three mayors sent to prison in a little more than two decades. Five police officers, two of whom are out on bail and three of whom have pleaded guilty, have been charged with planting evidence, making false arrests and trading drugs for information from prostitutes. County prosecutor Warren Faulk has had to drop charges against some 200 suspects, including some who'd spent years in prison, because of the misconduct. The city is dominated by an old-time party boss, George Norcross III. Although he does not live in Camden, his critics contend that he decides who runs for office and who does not, who gets city and state contracts and which projects get funded. Tens of millions in state funds have been used for city projects, from an aquarium on the waterfront to a new law school to an expansion of the Cooper University Hospital and construction of a medical school. In 2002 the state approved a $175 million recovery package to save the city, but according to a yearlong investigation by the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, only 5 percent had been used to combat crime, improve schools, provide jobs or bolster municipal services. Those who oppose Norcross insist he has turned the poverty and despair of Camden into a business. His critics charge that the new medical school, for example, was approved because it was part of a backroom deal Governor Jon Corzine cut with Norcross in Corzine's failed re-election bid. When I met with him, Norcross dismissed the allegations and defended his huge infrastructure projects as crucial to revitalizing the bleak downtown.

Camden, like America, was once an industrial giant. It employed some 36,000 workers in its shipyards during World War II and built some of the nation's largest warships. It was the home to major industries, from RCA Victor to the New York Ship Building Corporation and Campbell's Soup, which still has its international headquarters in a gated section of Camden but no longer makes soup in the city. Camden was a destination for Italian, German, Polish and Irish immigrants, who in the middle of the last century could find decent-paying jobs that required little English or education. The city's population has fallen by more than 40 percent from its 1950 level of 120,000. There are

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no movie theaters or hotels. There are lots with used cars but no dealerships that sell new vehicles. The one supermarket is located on the city's outskirts, away from the endemic street crime.

There are perhaps a hundred open-air drug markets, most run by gangs like the Bloods, the Latin Kings, Los Nietos and MS-13. Knots of young men in black leather jackets and baggy sweatshirts sell weed and crack to clients, many of whom drive in from the suburbs. The drug trade is one of the city's few thriving businesses. A weapon, police say, is never more than a few feet away, usually stashed behind a trash can, in the grass or on a porch. Camden is awash in guns, easily purchased across the river in Pennsylvania, where gun laws are lax.

Camden is the poster child of postindustrial decay. It stands as a warning of what huge pockets of the United States could turn into as we cement into place a permanent underclass of the unemployed, slash state and federal services in a desperate bid to cut massive deficits, watch cities and states go bankrupt and struggle to adjust to a stark neofeudalism in which the working and middle classes are decimated.

I found the city's homeless congregated in a collection of blue and gray tents, protected by tarps, set up under the shelter of a Route 676 ramp. The tent city, or "Transitional Park," was overseen by Lorenzo "Jamaica" Banks, 57, who bought damaged tents from Wal-Mart and Kmart at a reduced price, repaired them and provided them to the homeless—at $10 a pop, police told me. Banks insisted he offered them for free.

When I walked into the encampment with my colleague, comics artist Joe Sacco, Banks was chopping firewood. A man with receding black hair and a beard, Banks was dressed in carpenter's jeans and a plaid shirt over a gray hooded sweatshirt. There were about fifty tents in the park, and Banks owned forty of them. He spoke in the drumbeat staccato of a man who seems about to snap at any moment. He claimed to be a Vietnam vet, to have been a heroin addict now "clean for thirty-seven years," to have ended up after the war in a mental institution, to have jumped off the Ben Franklin Bridge in a suicide attempt because of "a lot of flashbacks" and to have spent "twenty-two years, six months, three hours and thirty-three seconds" in prison for shooting to death his best friend because he was "killing his baby in front of me."

"I'm better now," he assured us as the commuter train into Philadelphia rumbled along the tracks overhead. "I'm on medication. I live here because it reminds me of the jungle."

Banks, who called himself "the mayor," ran the tent city, which had a population of about sixty, ranging in age from 18 to 76, like a military encampment. He had a second-in-command, his "CEO," who took over when Banks had to buy supplies. There were weekly tent inspections on Saturday, weekly meetings every Tuesday night and a list of sixteen rules written on plywood tacked to a tree. These included restrictions on fighting

and arguing, admonishments to clean up the trash, an order not to sell food stamps and several other blunt prohibitions, including: "Don't bring your tricks here" and "No borrowing money or sex from anyone." Residents received two warnings for infractions before they were evicted. Drugs were banned. Alcohol was not. Banks had even set up a bank account for the enclave. At night there were shifts when someone—Banks said he preferred a vet—had to stand guard. There was a Dumpster filled with trash at the edge of the encampment, white folding tables with white plastic chairs and five-gallon plastic water containers outside many tents. Firewood lay scattered about the site.

"Take a look at the American Dream," Banks said as he guided us through the tents, stepping around rusted bicycles and shopping carts. "In today's society no one is exempt from Transitional Park. Everybody is one paycheck away from being here."

Officially, Camden has 775 homeless, but there are only 220 beds in the county, so city officials nervously tolerated the encampment, despite its illegality, until late spring, when they swiftly dismantled it. Those tossed out scattered, and about a half-dozen migrated to live in squalor under the concrete ramps of Route 676, where it runs across the river into Philadelphia.

Camden's streets are filled with the unemployed. Ali Sloan El, who recently got out of prison, is chatting with some men in the street, several of whom are Muslims like him and have shaved heads and long black beards. The group of men around Sloan El have just witnessed a botched robbery at a barbershop a few minutes before Joe and I arrive. A young gunman, nervous and unsure of himself, had pulled out a pistol and tried to

Chris Hedges, who spent fifteen years as a foreign correspondent for the New York Times, *is a Nation Institute fellow and the author of* Death of the Liberal Class. *Joe Sacco is a cartoonist whose most recent book is* Footnotes in Gaza. *Research support for this project was provided by the Investigative Fund at The Nation Institute.*

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rob the barbers. He was chased out of the shop by a group of men and tackled on the sidewalk. One of the barbers is at the police station filing a report.

The mood inside the shop is hostile. "How did you know about the stickup?" asks a barber who says his name is Sam. "We were told about it on the street," I answer. He arches his eyebrows in disbelief. "No one would talk to you on the street. No one would tell you nothin'," he says coldly. "A mother with a 2-year-old in a stroller told us," I tell him. "Yeah," he admitted reluctantly, "maybe that's right, maybe a mother would talk."

The rumor on the street, Sloan El informs us, is that the robber was high on a narcotic called wet. The drug of choice of Camden's criminal class, wet is made by soaking marijuana in embalming fluid, which is a mixture of formaldehyde, methanol, ethanol and other solvents. Phencyclidine, or PCP, known on the street as angel dust, is often added to the mix. Wet is smoked dry but the leaves, which glisten, give the drug its liquid name. Wet numbs its users and endows them with what seems to them like superhuman strength. Their body temperatures rise, their blood pressure drops and they frequently hallucinate. The high can last up to six hours. Two Camden police officers who do not want to be named tell us they fear confronting street thugs on wet. "You shoot them and they just keep coming," one says warily.

Those who do not join street gangs live like minnows, darting through the currents to avoid the predatory fish. Darnell Monroe, 33, wearing a new pair of brown Timberlands, a black leather jacket, jeans and a black-and-white checked kaffiyeh as a scarf, sits with us in the barbershop. One of the barbers immediately turns up the radio to a deafening roar, I suspect to drive us out. Monroe, also a Muslim, is a tall man with a shaved head and a full black beard. He spent four years in prison for dealing drugs. He became a father when he was 13. The mother was 16. "I'm sociable," he says when I ask him about surviving in Camden, "but I keep moving. I don't want to draw the wrong kind of attention. I don't want a conflict."

Monroe was shot three times in the stomach in 1998, when he was coming out of a bar and tried to break up a fight. "To this day I don't know who shot me," he says. He awoke in the hospital twelve weeks later. His kidney, liver and upper and lower intestine had been badly damaged. He lifts his shirt and exposes a massive scar on his stomach that looks like a brownish mountain range with jagged edges. "It was a .380 automatic," he says. Until he was laid off last year, Monroe had a job as a forklift operator in the scrap yards by the port. On the back of his right hand is a tattoo of a padlock with his current wife's initials, EGK, and under his left eye is a tattooed teardrop he got in jail, in 1993, when his sister died.

The city is busily cannibalizing itself in a desperate bid to generate revenue. Giant scrap piles rise in hulks along the banks of the Delaware. The piles, filled with discarded appliances, rusted filing cabinets, twisted pipes, old turbines and corrugated sheet metal, are as high as a three- or four-story house, and at their base are large pools of brackish water. A crane, outfitted with a large magnet, sways over the pile and swings scrap over to a shredding machine. A pickup and a U-Haul filled with old refrigerators, gates, screen doors and pipes are unloading in front of a small booth when we arrive. There are about twenty scrap merchants in the city, and they have created a market for the metal guts of apartments and houses. As soon as a house is empty—even if only for a few days between renters or because it is being painted—the hustlers break in and strip every pipe, radiator, screen door and window. Over the past three or four decades thousands of owners, faced with the destruction, have walked away from their properties. Camden produces a million tons of scrap a year. Its huge shredding machines in the port can chop up automobiles and stoves into chunks the size of a baseball. Ships from Turkey, China and India pull into the port and take the scrap back to smelters in their countries.

The only white people visible daily on the city's streets are the hookers. Congregated near the highway ramps on Ferry Street, most are heroin addicts and nearly all are infected with AIDS, hepatitis C or other sexually transmitted diseases. The women sleep in abandoned apartments without running water, heat or electricity.

If arresting someone on wet is the least pleasant duty for Camden police, arresting hookers is the second. "Ninety-nine percent of them are heroin addicts," a sergeant tells us. "I try not to deal with them. They have diseases. You pat them down and you find needles. You can get stuck with a needle. And they have MRSA, a skin disease with open sores. We have to get our cars disinfected afterward. Ninety-five percent have outstanding warrants, although they usually give us a wrong name."

Despite Camden's bleakness, despite its crime and its deprivation, despite the lost factory jobs that are never coming back—despite all this, valiant souls somehow rise up in magnificent defiance. In a room across the street from Sacred Heart Catholic Church, where meals are provided for the homeless on Saturdays, a group of African-American women bow their heads over a table and hold hands. They are led by Lallois Davis, 67, a heavyset woman who radiates an indomitable, unbroken spirit.

"The poor have to help the poor," Davis says, "because the ones who make the money are helping the people with money."

Davis raised four children and then, when a neighbor died, leaving behind her two orphaned grandsons, Davis took them in and raised them as well. She wears a large cross around her neck. She is known as Aunt Lallois.

"My heart is heavy," says a 69-year-old woman named Brenda Hayes, her head bowed and her eyes shut. "There is so much heaviness. It is wounding me. How can I not worry?"

"Yes, Jesus. Yes, Jesus," the other women respond.

"I know you didn't carry us this far to drop us now," she says. "I know there is no burden so heavy that we can't carry it with your help. I thank you, Lord, for friends who have carried me through the roughest times."

"Yes, Jesus. Nothing is impossible with you, Jesus," the women say.

"Bodies," Hayes says after the prayer. "Bodies out back. Bodies upstairs. People stabbed. I don't go out at night. The

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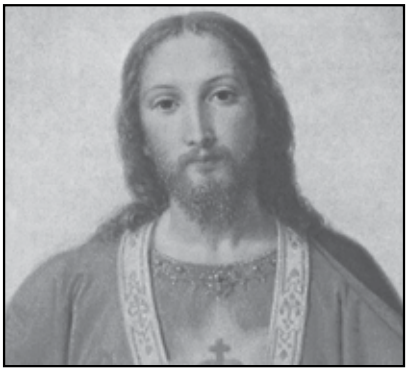

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Illustration of Jesus

About Your Professor

Dr. Bart D. Ehrman is the James A. Gray Professor and Chair of the Department of Religion at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The author or editor of 17 books, he has received many awards and prizes during his tenure at UNC including the Bowman and Gordon Gray Award for excellence in teaching.

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last one was twenty feet away from me on my floor. There was one kid, he lived in the back of the projects, 18 years old. They buried him two months ago. Gunshot. There were four kids I knew murdered, one in the parking lot who was killed last year. He was 12 or 13. He was sleeping—some say he was living—in a car."

"There are parents who are addicts who send their children out to sell drugs," Hayes adds. "I know a mother who is a prostitute. Her oldest daughter sells weed to go to school, and one day the mother stole the weed and sold it to buy crack."

Father Michael Doyle, an Irish priest, has been in the Sacred Heart parish for thirty-five years. He has witnessed the violence of poverty devastating his congregation. Father Doyle was a member of the Camden 28, a group of left-wing Catholics and anti–Vietnam War activists who in 1971 raided the city's draft board to destroy files. He was sent to Camden as punishment by church leaders who disapproved of his activism.

"Today's a very hard time to be poor," says Father Doyle, seated in the church rectory. "Because you know you're poor. You hear people my age get up and say, 'We were poor. We put cardboard in our shoes.' We talk like that. But we didn't know we were poor. Today you do. And how do you know you're poor? Your television shows you that you're poor. So it's very easy to build up anger in a, say, a high-voltage kid of 17. He knows he's poor, he looks at the TV and all these people have everything and I have nothing. And so he's very angry.... I'm talking about the violence that rises out of the marketing that shows the kid what he could have, creates a huge anger that explodes easily. That I discovered very quickly when I came to Camden. I discovered the anger was so near the surface, you just rub it and it explodes. And there's no respect for you if you have no money."

I ask him why the rage is invariably self-destructive. "They can't get at it," he said. "You have an enemy, and that enemy is greed and prejudice and injustice and all that type of thing, but you can't get at it. There's no head, there's no clarity, so you take it out on your neighbor. It's just horrendous what people do."

"Women have some dignity in a poor ghetto because they bear children and raise them," Father Doyle goes on. "Men are adding nothing and feeding from the trough. A woman walks down the street pushing a little cart, and a child on it—she's somebody. But the man standing watching her is nobody."

It is a bleak, rainy afternoon when we visit Harleigh Cemetery. Walt Whitman's tomb, based on a design drawn by William Blake, is here with its heavy stone front and peaked roof with the poet's name in imposing stone letters. So is the grave of another Camden poet, Nicholas Virgilio, who, as Father Doyle says, "mined beauty out of the gutters of Camden." Virgilio died of a heart attack in 1989. The priest designed his grave in the shape of a podium. One of the poet's verses is engraved on the stone:

> lily:
> out of the water…
> out of itself.

Virgilio, who wrote his poems in his basement under a naked light bulb next to his washing machine, chronicled the slow strangulation of his city. The hookers knitting baby booties on a bus; sitting alone as he orders eggs and toast in an undertone on Thanksgiving; latchkey children "exploring the wild on public television"; the frozen body of a drunk found on a winter morning in a cardboard box labeled "Fragile: Do Not Crush"; as well as laments for his brother Larry, killed in Vietnam. I open his thin book, *Selected Haiku*, to a passage and place it on the marble top of his grave. Droplets of rain splatter the page:

> the sack of kittens
> sinking in the icy creek
> increases the cold ■

The End of Free-Trade Globalization

To restore economic stability, the US must rethink its approach to domestic manufacturing.

by WILLIAM GREIDER

The world economy is on the brink again, facing a crisis of epic dimensions for reasons largely obscured by the inflamed politics of 2010. Against their wishes, the United States and China have been drawn into an increasingly nasty and dangerous fight over currencies and trade. American politicians, especially desperate Democrats, have framed the conflict in familiar moral terms—a melodrama of America wronged—and demand retaliation. Other nations, sensing the risk of a larger breakdown, have begun to take protective measures. Every man for himself. The center is not holding.

The political fray obscures the fact that the basic economic problem is larger than any single nation and stalks the global trading system itself. There is a huge hole in the world—a massive loss of demand. Think of the trade wars as the largest producers fighting over an abrupt shortage of buyers. Financial collapse and recession, with falling income, defaulting debt and rising unemployment, made the hole. In other times, Washington would have stepped in to impose policy solutions and create market demand as the global system's buyer of last resort. This time, Goliath is gravely weakened, both in economic strength and political authority.

The political push-pull zeroes in on China. Beijing is accused of playing dirty, stealing jobs, production and wealth.

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Washington imposes a penalty tariff on Chinese tires and tubular steel. Beijing pushes back with a tariff on US poultry. President Obama once again urges China to stop manipulating its currency to underprice Chinese exports and stymie US goods going the other way. China once again blows off his request. United Steelworkers ups the ante by filing a 5,800-page complaint detailing how China is scheming to corner the global market in green technologies. Obama promptly orders an investigation. "What do the Americans want?" asks the vice chair of Beijing's National Development and Reform Commission. "Do they want fair trade? Or an earnest dialogue?… I don't think they want any of this. I think more likely, the Americans just want votes." He has a point. But so do American politicians, who think China's hardball industrial strategy has had something to do with America's anemic recovery. The House, divided on everything else, voted 348-79 in September to authorize tariffs on nearly all Chinese imports if Beijing does not relent in its currency game.

JANNA BROWER

The US public seems to agree with the harsh stance. A *Wall Street Journal* poll found that 53 percent (including 61 percent of Tea Party adherents) think free-trade globalization has hurt the US economy. Only 17 percent think it has helped. But the trouble with Americans claiming injured innocence is that it blinds them to the complexities of the predicament. The fact is, the United States and China, motivated by different but mutually reinforcing reasons, collaborated to create the unbalanced trading system. American multinationals eagerly sought access to China's market. The Chinese wanted factories and the modern technologies needed to develop a first-class industrial base. American companies agreed to the basic trade-off: China would let them in to make and sell stuff, and they would share technology and teach Chinese partners how it's done. Not coincidentally, US corporations also gained enormous bargaining power over workers back home by threatening to go abroad for cheaper labor if unions didn't give wage concessions.

Washington blessed the deal. Both parties were convinced decades ago that improving the fortunes of globalizing banks and businesses was in the broad national interest. The Clinton administration capitulated to Chinese negotiators in 2000, admitting China to the World Trade Organization while giving up legal tools that could have controlled China's appetites.

Chinese officials understand, even if many Americans do not, that they are essentially doing what the trading system has allowed or at least tolerated from many others. Washington grumbled when Japan and then South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore pursued similar development strategies. Arrogant US policy-makers assumed that these rivals would eventually adopt the American model and become more like us. They never really have.

The problem is that when a nation of 1.3 billion successfully advances along this road, it blows out the lights. Decades ago, when Washington scolded Japanese officials for violating free-trade orthodoxy, they bowed humbly and made agreeable noises. The Chinese don't bother. They are unabashed because they have always been much more up front about their intentions. In the early 1990s Beijing published a series of directives for major industrial sectors, describing precisely how the state intended to direct the rise of its industrial base. China manipulates its currency—though so do other governments when it serves their interests (indignant senators bash China for depressing its currency, but Washington is doing the very same thing to the dollar through the money spigots of the Federal Reserve). The Chinese also know that Japan suffered years of depressed growth after Washington pushed it into raising the value of its currency. China pirates US intellectual property, and it suppresses wages to attract factories from the United States and elsewhere. It lures major US multinationals by offering tax breaks and subsidies—but it also compels the companies to share their precious technologies with Chinese partners, who are always majority owners.

Which brings us to the present crisis. China's exports exploded toward the end of the Clinton years and expanded even more ferociously under George W. Bush. So did the offloading of US jobs and manufacturing. China's wave of new competition crashed over every industrial economy, but disruptions were most devastating for the United States. American trade deficits soared, peaking at close to 6 percent of GDP in 2006. Imports from China dwarfed exports in sector after sector, including many advanced technological goods developed in America. The goods are often made by US companies, but not here. The US economy has been buying more than it produces—a lot more—and borrowing from foreign creditors, most heavily from China, to do so.

"I admire the Chinese for recognizing the world economy is still a jungle, despite all of its legal trappings," says Alan Tonelson, a conservative trade critic at the US Business and Industrial Council. "But here's the problem. They don't seem to understand that unless the US economy recovers its financial and economic health, the entire world will come crashing down. The reason is, we won't be able to serve any longer as the import sponge that buys from everyone else."

We have reached the endpoint of globalization as we have known it. It cannot continue as before, because the United States is essentially tapped out. Goliath has fallen and cannot get up. Who will lend a hand? Not China, obviously, but also not Japan and the Asian Tigers, or the European nations. All are dealing with their own problems. All but the smallest economies run perennial trade surpluses with the United States. Giving up some of those surpluses means surrendering some portion of domestic growth in order to stabilize the system. No one wants to go first. This is a dangerous impasse, the kind that can easily slip into a general unwinding—that is, depression—if not resolved smartly. "The world is no longer in a common foxhole…but in many different foxholes," observes economist Paul McCulley of PIMCO, the world's largest bond

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house. Japan and South Korea devalue their currencies to protect their exports (so has the United States). Brazil puts limits on capital inflows to stop foreign money from destabilizing its economy. Currency war is a surrogate for trade war, one of the few levers governments can still manipulate unilaterally.

For Americans the most ominous development is that trade deficits, after shrinking during the recession, are expanding rapidly again. That stands in the way of recovery and helps explain why the federal stimulus of 2009 had less punch than expected. The trap is illustrated by a few recent statistics: the US economy expanded in the second quarter of 2010 by an anemic annualized rate of 1.7 percent. During those same months, however, the nation's trade deficit expanded by 3.5 percent. Do the arithmetic: the US economy would have grown at a much healthier rate if it weren't for its dependence on products made elsewhere. Yet getting different results will take much more than currency adjustments. It means reforming the dynamics of global trade and the US industrial structure, not just the bad habits of American consumers.

'Unless the US economy recovers its financial and economic health, the entire world will come crashing down.' –Alan Tonelson

President Obama, unlike his predecessors, understands the problem. He has been trying for the past year to persuade foreign governments to cooperate, with meager results so far. Obama told G-20 leaders in April 2009, "The world has become accustomed to the United States being a voracious consumer market and the engine that drives a lot of economic growth worldwide.... [But] if there's going to be renewed growth, it can't just be the United States as the engine. Everybody is going to have to pick up the pace." At the G-20 meeting this past June, the president was more explicit. "After years of taking on too much debt," he said, "Americans cannot—and will not—borrow and buy the world's way to lasting prosperity. No nation should assume its path to prosperity is simply paved with exports to the United States."

There's no easy road to peace. The target is not only China but some of Washington's old friends, who run bloated surpluses at US expense. The Obama administration pushed concrete measures at the meeting of finance ministers in South Korea in October. Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner proposed a new global rule that would require nations running trade surpluses to shrink them to no more than 4 percent of GDP, presumably by buying more imports from debtor countries, while debtor nations like the United States would have to reduce deficits by the same amount, to less than 4 percent.

Geithner's strict numerical limits were not accepted, but his proposal represents an important first step—a US administration coming to terms with American weakness and stepping away from the free-trade dogma that led to the crisis. The president recognizes the global nature of the problem. But I expect he will be compelled to take a tougher step—acting unilaterally. He will have to act for the United States in ways that get other nations, especially China, to take him seriously. Washington could, for example, declare a financial emergency, enacting legislation to put a ceiling on US trade deficits and begin a gradual process of reducing them. That would be a signal to exporting nations and multinational corporations that the good old days are over.

But shrinking the trade deficits, important as it will be, is not sufficient. Washington must also change the rules for how American business and finance operate. Only in America do multinationals get to behave like free riders, with no strings attached. They harvest public money as subsidies and investment capital, they are protected by US armed forces and diplomacy, and they are rescued when they get into trouble. It is a one-way relationship, and the American public knows it.

US corporations and banks remain free to move jobs and production whenever and wherever corporate strategy dictates, regardless of the consequences for the economy. Government can stop this by forcing them to serve the broader national interest. This is not as radical as it may sound. Every other leading industrial nation does it, one way or another. They impose limits on corporate strategy, either in formally binding ways or through political and cultural pressure, to ensure that good jobs and the best value-added production remains at home.

Washington can accomplish this only through unilateral action, not free-trade agreements. It has to rewrite trade law, tax law and policies on workforce development and subsidy. Resistance will be fierce, given the power and influence of big-name banks and corporations, but the public will surely support efforts to make the big guys serve the country's well-being.

If Washington doesn't make these broad structural changes, another popular idea will prove illusory—that US manufacturing can be rebuilt around green technologies. China is already doing this, and is far ahead. It has 35 percent of the global market in solar panels and is poised to dominate other green technologies. The United States, in fact, has swelling trade deficits in this sector. American companies work both sides of the competition, collecting subsidies on both ends.

Doubters may say that Obama doesn't have the nerve to tackle this problem. They may be right. But the president is clearly thinking along these lines. He is the first president in thirty years to call for restoration of US manufacturing. This past summer he pushed modest tax measures that give a small advantage to home-based producers. The impact was so meager that Republicans didn't bother to object. But the GOP may also have grasped that measures favoring US factories over foreign ones will be wildly popular with voters. Obama repeated the message before a Labor Day audience in Milwaukee, saying, "I don't want to see solar panels and wind turbines and electric cars made in China. I want them made right here in the United States of America."

The best evidence for Obama's potential comes from liberal-labor reformers fighting the trench warfare on trade cases while

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advocating far more fundamental reforms. "The president has been true to his word and very supportive on trade-law enforcement—better than any president since before NAFTA," says Leo Gerard, president of the United Steelworkers. "The president is trying to do the right thing on outsourcing, on taking away tax breaks from multinationals."

Senator Sherrod Brown of Ohio cites a series of White House decisions on trade and stimulus spending that saved 400 jobs in Youngstown, more jobs in Lorain and 1,000 steel industry jobs overall. "On each case, we had to beat the hell out of the White House," Brown allows, "but this White House is more open to manufacturing than any in memory. When the president focuses on the facts, he comes down on our side." Brown and Gerard hope to build visibility and mobilize popular support that will push the president and Congress to embrace more ambitious reforms. "They have a manufacturing strategy, but it is not yet a manufacturing policy," Brown says.

The president's familiar style of wanting to split the difference in a tough fight is evident on trade. Obama appointed Ron Bloom, a Wall Street veteran close to the Steelworkers, as a special adviser on manufacturing—but the president continues to support more trade agreements. And Bloom, I was told, has been walled off from trade policy by Larry Summers, the departing economic adviser. The president talks up his goal of doubling exports but neglects to mention that imports are again swelling. "You can't get this economy out of the ditch doubling exports," Gerard says, "if at the same time you are tripling imports."

Washington must change the rules for business. Only in America do multinationals get to behave like free riders, with no strings attached.

Another leading indicator for potential change is that a few influential industry leaders are deviating from the standard corporate line. Jeffrey Immelt, CEO of General Electric, has called for the revitalization of manufacturing and suggests that the United States can become the leading exporter. "In some areas, we have outsourced too much," Immelt admitted in a speech last year to the Detroit Economic Club. "We plan to 'insource' capabilities like aviation component manufacturing and software development." GE's strategic shift sounds shocking (and unreal to union leaders) because the company has been the most notorious player in offshoring assembly lines and jobs. GE's 288,000 worldwide employment is now 53 percent foreign. The unions that represent workers at GE had more than 100,000 members there in the 1970s; they are now reduced to about 15,000.

A more persuasive break from past dogma was expressed by Andrew Grove, former CEO, now senior adviser, of Intel and a revered figure in Silicon Valley. Grove wrote a blunt confessional essay for Bloomberg titled "How to Make an American Job Before It's Too Late." The government, he urged, must intervene to end the offshoring game his semiconductor firm and other computer giants have played for many years. Tax the product of offshore labor, Grove proposed, and use the money to help other US companies scale up production at home. "If the result is a trade war, treat it like other wars—fight to win," he declared.

Grove took a shot at *New York Times* columnist and globalization cheerleader Thomas Friedman, who claims "innovation" will keep America on top. Not if US inventions do not lead to US production, Grove argued. Friedman and other free-traders, he said, don't seem to understand that the computer industry adheres to its own exit-to-China strategy for dumping US workers. When a start-up is in development, investors insist even before the product becomes a big seller that executives work out the timing for offshoring jobs.

The US computer industry, Grove observed, employs only 166,000—fewer than in 1975, when the first PC was assembled—while the industry in Asia employs 1.5 million workers, engineers and managers. The world's largest computer maker, China's Foxconn, employs 800,000. They make the products Americans know as Dell, Apple, Microsoft, Hewlett-Packard and Intel.

Union leaders suspect that the same story is playing out at GE. The company was founded on Edison's invention of the incandescent bulb, but this past summer GE closed its last US light-bulb factory, a highly automated, nonunion plant in Winchester, Virginia. Old-style bulbs will still be made in Latin America and Asia, where wages and healthcare are cheaper, and for a time they will still be sold in the United States with the GE label. But the company is moving on, shifting to two new green-tech products that promise vast reductions in energy consumption. Congress is effectively banning US production of incandescents by mandating efficiency standards, starting in 2012.

Both of the new light-bulb technologies were invented in America. But the new bulbs, GE said, will be made overseas, and for the usual reasons: US workers are considered too expensive. They face the same grim choice that has prevailed for decades: either wages get busted from $25–$30 an hour to $13–$15, or the jobs disappear. That trend has been gradually eroding the American middle class.

Stephen Tormey, representative of the United Electrical Workers (UE) at GE, sees a shrewd corporate strategy. "I think GE saw they could make more money with these new technologies and get subsidized by the government as energy-efficient if they became born-again believers in American manufacturing," he says. "I'm all for that. I will stand on the sidelines and cheer—if it's true. So far we haven't seen it. You see these little moves here and there, but so far they are still a globalizing company."

GE is bringing some jobs home. With lots of fanfare, it has announced new moves to restore jobs at various US plants, sometimes to make products like more expensive, energy-saving home water heaters. But union officials are not impressed. They read GE's vaguely worded promises and produce a list of plant closings and job losses. "Press releases do not create jobs," says Chris Townsend, UE's Washington representative.

GE is a brilliant example of how a globalizing company manages its worldwide supply chain, moving elements of pro-

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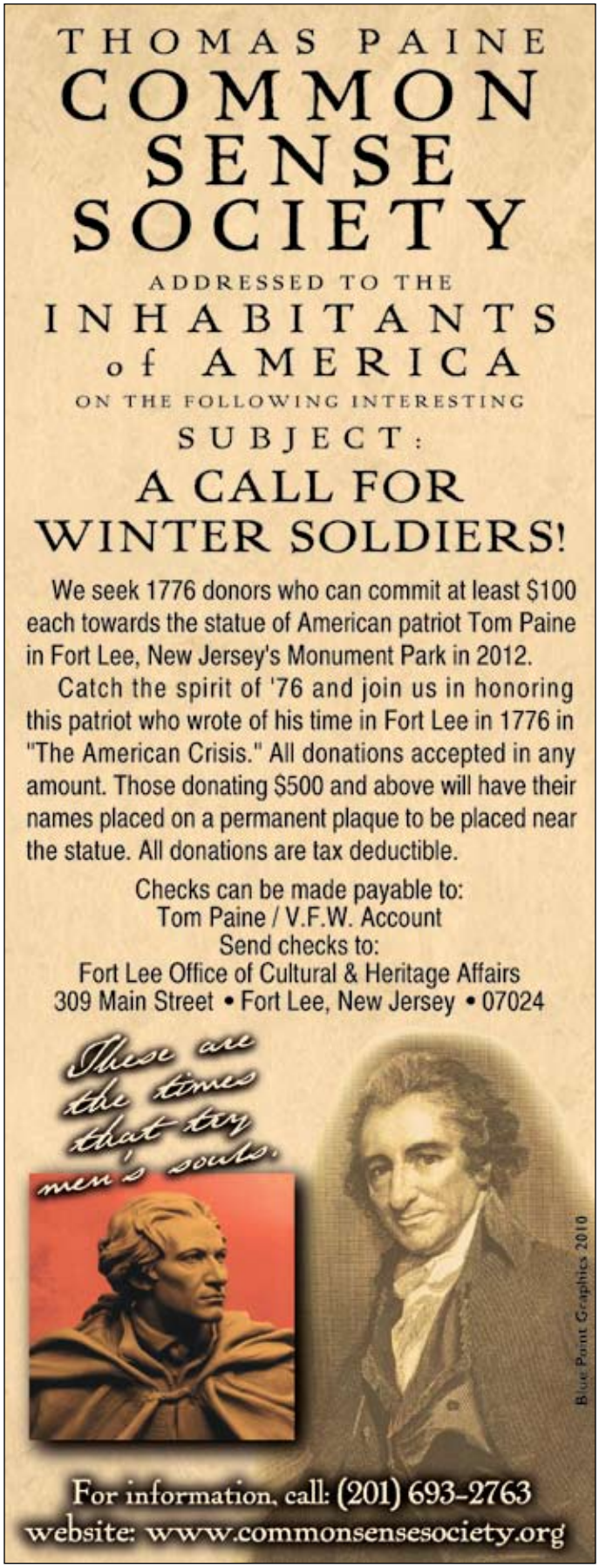
duction based on costs and market demand. Divided loyalty comes with the territory. GE assembles wind turbines in South Carolina and China. It harvests tax breaks and subsidies from Washington as well as Beijing. Which side is GE on? Its own, and it will go wherever profits are highest. But this race to the bottom undermines standards in both rich and poor countries. The downward pressure on wages, and the obsessive search for lower prices and greater profits, destroys aggregate demand for the entire system. It feeds the deflation that threatens to bring down the world economy.

Multinationals drive the destructive cycle but are also its prisoners. They cannot quit on their own without losing out to other companies. Only governments, acting together and individually, have the power to reverse the cycle before it is too late. The US government can confront these negative forces by altering bottom-line incentives for multinationals based here. It can do this through the tax code, by levying a stiff penalty on corporations that continue to offshore more production than they create at home.

Public subsidies are another leverage point. Instead of competing with other nations to provide the biggest subsidies, Washington could disqualify companies from any form of subsidy unless they agree to accept concrete performance terms reflecting national loyalty. The obvious means of enforcement is a staple device of American capitalism—the enforceable contract. When GE gets capital and other financial support from taxpayers, it makes no promises about how long the jobs will stay at home or even if jobs will be created. The government should get it in writing: if the company is unwilling to make such commitments, it won't receive any money. If GE decides to break the promise, the contract will make the company return the money or surrender the security bond required up front. Government, in other words, should mimic practices that are routine on Wall Street and in corporate finance.

If Washington also adopts sterner measures to reduce its trade deficits, the discipline will alter strategic decision-making by firms like GE. A collar that steadily closes the trade gap would create risks for offshoring companies and capital investment abroad, since foreign production would lose its assured access to the American consumer. A border tax on social costs would provide a similar way to defend American standards from free riders overseas. If, for example, the United States decides it must raise costs for domestic producers to reduce pollution or hydrocarbon consumption, foreign factories should be required to pay an equivalent border tax on imports if their country of origin does not impose similar costs on production. An emergency general tariff would be a more extreme version of the same principle.

All these suggestions are deeply disruptive to global commerce, and, yes, many would raise prices for Americans. But the country's predicament is a historic emergency that cannot wait for market solutions. The United States must, in effect, decide that its role as Goliath is over. It's time to act like a nation again rather than as the global overseer. If Barack Obama doesn't find the nerve to act, maybe the next president will. ■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Letters

(continued from page 2)

Boulder Creek, Calif.
Ari Berman absolutely nailed it! I worked in the Dean and Obama campaigns as a volunteer. I was in Iowa the night of the Dean "scream." I've worked in the DFA and OFA. I went to an OFA "listening tour" event, where the audience did all the listening. Friends at other events describe similar one-way formats. I worked for change in the Democratic Party when Dean was DNC chair. Berman is right about why so many activists are so frustrated. I thank him for speaking for us.
Chris Finnie

Longmont, Colo.
Ari Berman's "Herding Donkeys" is a wakeup call. Is President Obama's separation from the people who put him in the White House through all their hard work and outreach his choice, or has he been maneuvered into that insular position? Thomas Geoghegan's "Ten Things Dems Could Do to Win" [Sept. 27] inspired me to send a copy to Obama. Yet as I mailed it, I knew he would never see it. Barack Obama the candidate appeared open, honest and approachable; President Obama seems cut off, isolated and shielded from his grassroots. How did that happen and why? And what can we do to turn this around?
R.E. Joyce

Altruism of the Fittest?

Rohnert Park, Calif.
As a professor of mathematics, I rarely see anything in *The Nation* about my field. So it was a delightful surprise to find "The Group" [Oct. 11], an elegant article by Miriam Markowitz about an important topic in my field. Thanks!
Rick Luttmann

Northridge, Calif.
Miriam Markowitz employs the inductive and deductive logic of science involving either/or choices: either evolution is controlled by the competition of natural selection or altruism is an equally important component of evolution. Although classical science requires either/or choices, atomic physicist Niels Bohr urged the use of the concept of the complementary to consider not only the relationship of protons and electrons but also many other scientific relationships, especially in psychology.

I have developed the logic of complementary systems dynamics to consider evolutionary processes. In *Evolution and Reason—Beyond Darwin* (1993), I propose that evolution is guided by the complementary processes of competition and cooperation (symbiosis). The use of complementary systems dynamics in evolution theory considers the following: mutation and selection are two concepts that may appear to be mutually exclusive, need different criteria to judge their essence, are a whole, function together in dynamic equilibrium, interact in reciprocal moments of time.

Mutation and natural selection appear to be mutually exclusive because they traditionally have been separated into the disciplines microbiology–genetics and paleontology–evolution. The criteria for judging mutations lie in chemical, physical and microscopic analysis of organisms, while the criteria for judging selection lie in analysis of bone/fossil placement in environmental strata. Mutation and selection constitute a whole in the concept of evolution. Mutation requires selection and selection requires mutation. The two dynamic processes interact at many levels in reciprocal time frames.

Another example of complements: although many male species compete for females, females must cooperate with the "winning" male to produce offspring if selection is to be among the most fit individuals. Thus, this is a modification of Darwinism and inclusion of the many ideas of authors regarding the importance of cooperation, symbiosis and altruism. The logic of complementary systems dynamics places a new and broader emphasis on evolution theory.
Dorothy Kurth Boberg

Very Crafty

Angola, Ind.
My interest was piqued and neurons pleasingly synapsed by Barry Schwabsky's "Good-Enough Objects" [Oct. 11], a critical discourse of crafts. As for Schwabsky's closing wish for "someone to put just enough order into them to shake things up but not enough to nail them down," I think the irritatingly concise yet honorably staunch "DIY" has shown its value.
Ruben Ryan

Portland, Ore.
There it is again! The ubiquitous word "handicraft," courtesy of a quote in "Good-Enough Objects." It makes serious craft work sound like just a nice pastime making things for the home from pre-assembled kits. Can we all please drop the devaluing diminutive "i" and use the simpler and more dignified word "handcraft"?
Cleo Reilly

Above the Fruited Plain

Abiquiu, N.M.
I kept reading Charles Petersen's meditation on the human ebb and flow across the Great Plains ["Unsettled," Oct. 4], expecting to find some discussion of the impact of the Homestead Act of 1862 on the native populations. Midway through, he quotes a lament by Romantic painter Charles Russell—"the Indians and the buffalo have gone"—as if this were an incidental passing of nature. This is his only (indirect) acknowledgment that the Great Plains had quite recently been Indian territory and not simply open range for cattle. His discussion of ecological history is framed by the impact of cattle ranching and agriculture on an environment suited for neither, ignoring the longer period of human habitation by various native cultures.

Although the settlers flocking to stake their claims to farmland did not bear the "degrading legacy of slavery, sharecropping, grinding poverty and soil depletion that has overlaid the rural South," they were occupiers of lands newly available after military defeat. Sitting Bull was the last major plains leader to surrender, in 1881. This is the kind of historical amnesia that keeps our shared history segregated and incomplete.
Sabra Moore

Keeping Hope Alive

Highland, N.Y.
My profound thanks to E.L. Doctorow for his "Calamity of Heart" [Aug. 30/Sept. 6]. He described in the most beautiful prose what I've been feeling since those disgusting Supremes elected Bush president in 2000. Doctorow gives me hope for a better future.
Joseph F. DiBlanca

Correction

Alyssa Katz's "Who's Afraid of Progressive Power?" [Nov. 1] says New Yorkers for Growth is led by state GOP chief Ed Cox. Cox left NYG in August 2009 and had no affiliation with the group when Andrew Cuomo got the WFP endorsement.

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Books & the Arts.

Texts for Nothing?

by BEN EHRENREICH

The first manifesto came in 1999, declaring boldly, cryptically and with an indeterminate quantity of facetiousness that "death is a type of space which we intend to map, enter, colonise and, eventually, inhabit." The "we" was the International Necronautical Society (INS), of which the then-30-year-old and still unpublished British novelist Tom McCarthy was founder and self-declared general secretary. "We are all necronauts, always, already," the manifesto continued, winking with those concluding coupled adverbs at the French philosopher Jacques Derrida. Other lines echoed Georges Bataille and Maurice Blanchot ("Let us deliver ourselves over utterly to death, not in desperation but rigorously, creatively"); but for all its Franco- and necrophiliac pomp, the fledgling INS undercut any risked pretentiousness with straight-faced prankish glee.

The art world lapped it up, opening galleries, museums and residencies to McCarthy's INS, which for the next decade would waggishly skewer and exalt its avant-garde heritage with each new document and event. In 2003 McCarthy announced a purge of the group's First Committee, expelling most of its founding members—two of them for "reasserting the certainties of middle-brow aesthetics" (they got book contracts) and another, the playwright Matt Parker, for the crime of "not being dead." Parker would be officially reinstated upon his death in 2009, two years after McCarthy and INS "chief philosopher" Simon Critchley (of the New School and, lately, the blog-ed page of the *New York Times*) issued a "Joint Statement on Inauthenticity," in a few opening breaths squeezing in references to Heidegger, Empedocles, Baudelaire, Joyce and Wile E. Coyote.

The declaration, read at an event that may or may not have transpired by men who may or may not have been McCarthy and Critchley, was at once a Derridean assault on all philosophical notions of being-as-presence and an attack on any pretense of authenticity in art. The necronaut officials cast their lot, as good Modernists have for the past fifteen decades, with art as artifice, imitation, play. "Art's dirty secret is inauthenticity all the way down," they announced, ceremoniously opening a bag from which the cat had long ago fled. From Baudelaire to Warhol to Bowie to Prince and giddy, giddy Gaga, that secret's all over the dial.

This would all be so much clever art world frippery if McCarthy were not also a formidable talent as a novelist. And literature—or at least its English-language market-prose variant; poetry's not quite so daft—is the one contemporary popular art form that still falls for its own naturalist swindle. It's the only dupe so credulous (or cynical) as to require occasional reminding that even, and especially, in the sparkling heights of realism, art is naught but theft and apery and con, and its transient truths are wrought from chains of falsities. To tear dark Saint Bataille gently out of context: "Literature is not innocent. It is guilty and should admit itself so." You don't have to embrace Bataille's goofball mysticism and fetishization of violence—or McCarthy's tongue-half-in-cheek adaptation thereof—to join them both in asking literature to acknowledge itself as a far craftier and more adventurous playmate than even the most faithful of mirrors.

ERINN HARTMAN

C
by Tom McCarthy.
Knopf. 310 pp. $25.95.

In 2005 McCarthy published an odd, smart and viciously funny novel called *Remainder* with the small French art press Metronome. Despite the title's nod to Derrida—as in, ahem, "the non-present *remainder* of a differential mark cut off from its putative 'production' or origin"—*Remainder* wore its theory lightly. For all McCarthy's *prêt-à-porter* avant-gardism, the novel's prose is straightforward, univocal and relatively unself-conscious, its plot linear and unadorned. This is not to say that *Remainder* is a simple book, but McCarthy took pains not to announce its mischievous intents too boldly. It wore pressed khakis in lieu of black leather.

McCarthy's philosophical rejection of authenticity and presence has consequences for the novel as a form. It implies a repudiation of the basic mythological structure undergirding what gets called "realism" in literature: the transit through time of more or less stable entities known as characters, generally toward the revelation of previously

Ben Ehrenreich, a journalist and novelist based in Los Angeles, is the author of The Suitors.

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hidden and potentially redemptive truths about themselves. Contrast that with *Remainder*'s nameless and almost featureless narrator, recently recovered from an accident about which he can say nothing except that something—"Technology. Parts, bits"—fell on him out of the sky. He is awarded an £8.5 million settlement about which he evinces no excitement. Mainly he is struck (and stuck) by an unshakable feeling of inauthenticity, as if he is acting in his own life, and acting poorly. Beckett's Watt ("who had not seen a symbol, nor executed an interpretation, since the age of fourteen, or fifteen") he's not, but he lacks the usual set of carefully crafted psychological motivations. He begins the book a blank and ends it even more so. McCarthy couldn't care less about his past.

One evening, suffering through a cocktail party, the narrator takes refuge in the bathroom and, staring at a crack in the paint beside the mirror, has a vision (or a memory, or a déjà vu) of another bathroom in another apartment with identically cracked paint. Details flood in: the smell of liver drifting up from the old woman's flat beneath his; the piano music from the flat below that; the black cats on the roof across the street. And in that remembered or imagined apartment, he is certain he felt "real": "Not awkward, acquired, second-hand, but natural." So he hires a team to search out the building from his vision, then goes ahead and finds it himself. He buys it and the building across the street, and has both renovated to precisely match every recollected detail. He hires another team (not actors but "re-enactors") to play the piano player, the "liver lady," other bit players from his déjà vu. He has the roof across the way stocked with cats. (They keep sliding off, requiring frequent replacement.)

The irony will not be missed that the most absurd and elaborate artifice is necessary to create the illusion of the real. As McCarthy puts it elsewhere: "the counterfeit is the pre-condition of the 'real': the very *notions* of the 'real' and 'natural' are generated and sustained through an elaborate economy of cultural conventions—artificial signs that, having done their job, pretend merely to represent the very thing they have created."

His novel, rest assured, is more fun than the theory behind it. The narrator's obsession builds. He enacts other re-enactments: re-creating a banal encounter in a tire shop; a gang murder a few blocks from his flat; the moment just before the re-enactment of the gang murder (for which he must hire new re-enactors to play the re-enactors). In each, he aims with unmitigated absurdity "to be real—to become fluent, natural, to cut out the detour that sweeps us around what's fundamental to events, preventing us from touching their core." Then things really get weird—a bank heist, a hijacking, re-enactments of events that have not yet transpired—and gloriously so.

Through all of this, McCarthy doesn't stray far from the INS's original bullet-pointed mission. (One of the Necronauts' early happenings involved the meticulous restaging of a mob shootout on an Amsterdam street.) I won't be giving anything away if I say that death haunts these re-enactments. The man killed by gangsters, McCarthy's narrator says, "had become a symbol of perfection.... He'd done what I wanted to do: merged with the space around him, sunk and flowed into it until there was no distance between it and him." Hunger for the real, McCarthy suggests, is the death drive reconfigured.

The most absurd and elaborate artifice is necessary to create the illusion of the real.

In the two years that followed the initial publication of *Remainder*, something almost miraculous occurred, something that isn't supposed to happen anymore to obscure and eccentric novels with a rigorous intellectual bent. The book became a hit. It leapfrogged from its tiny French art press to a small, well-respected British press (Alma) and thence to a large and prestigious American press (Vintage). It was reviewed twice in the *New York Review of Books*, once by Joyce Carol Oates and a second time by Zadie Smith, for whom it proved something of a revelation; it typified the less traveled of her "Two Paths for the Novel," the other being the well-trod path of "lyrical Realism" epitomized for her by Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland*. (Zadie, are there really only two paths?) A film version of *Remainder* is reportedly in the works. McCarthy must be pleased: actors will re-enact his re-enactments and the re-enactments of their re-enactments. Whither goes the real?

In 2007, the year *Remainder* appeared in the United States, McCarthy published two books in Britain: a novel called *Men in Space*, much of which predates *Remainder*, and hasn't yet found a New World release, and a delightful work of literary criticism called *Tintin and the Secret of Literature*, published here in 2008. Ostensibly a deconstruction of, and affectionate tribute to, the Belgian cartoonist Hergé's cowlicked serial adventurer, McCarthy's *Tintin* study also functions as a convenient guide to some of the obsessions that animate his new and most ambitious novel, *C*: Freud's Wolf Man, crypts and cysts and codes, transmission and static, technology and death.

C stands first of all for Carrefax, the surname of McCarthy's protagonist, Serge—as in the silken fabric; as in a surge or wave or sudden burst of current; and as in Sergei Pankajev, the subject of Freud's case study in infantile neurosis, who is better known as the Wolf Man and to whom our Serge bears more than a passing resemblance. We'll get to that. For now forget *Remainder*'s stark *nouveau roman* minimalism. In *C*, Nabokovian wordplay abounds. The characters not only have names, but each name is a web of echoes and allusions. So let Carrefax lead you to "carapace"—insects are important here—or to "caracole," with its spiraling, cryptlike depths, even to deathly "catafalque." Dig in deeper and you'll find "fax," of course, short for "facsimile" and denoting not only technology and transmission but replication—key concerns in *C*'s cosmography. And in that prefix you might hear *kara*, Turkish for "black," or perhaps even *kar*, Syldavian for "king" (Syldavian being the language spoken in the fictional Balkan nation of Syldavia, where, you may recall, brave Tintin foiled a Bordurian plot to steal King Ottokar's scepter). Jam these associations together if you like—"black king of technological transmission" is not a bad descriptor for young Serge—or let the allusions drift and frolic, as McCarthy suggests in his *Tintin* study, as a "dynamic set of overlayings and cross-encodings... that resonate at levels far beyond that of any individual, re-encrypting themselves as they speak."

The basics: Serge is born in 1898 on his family's country estate, Versoie (cf. *ver à soie*, "silkworm"), somewhere outside London. His opiate-addict mother oversees the estate's proto-industrial silk works while his scientist-humanist father runs a school for the deaf and invents various wired and wireless contraptions, always one step behind Marconi and Bell in the patent game. Already we have a short history of human communication: from the stubborn tongues of old man Carrefax's students to the Huguenot looms on which Madame Carrefax's workers weave elaborate tapestries, to the electrical pulses leaping the wires strung

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around the estate by Carrefax *père*. Add a brilliant older sister, Sophie—obsessed with cryptography, bugs and poisons—who plays telegraph operator with Serge's prepubescent privates, and a mysterious godfather, Widsun, who is more than likely also Sophie's lover and, *shhh*, Serge's bio-dad.

McCarthy thus provides all the makings for a toothsome family drama, which *C* decidedly is not. Nor is it a *Bildungsroman* or a historical novel, though it might masquerade as either. What matters here is not *Bildung* or fidelity but return, structured repetition, flickery overlays of pattern. All narrative advances are also descents and reversals. No sooner do we meet the cast of Carrefaxes than McCarthy tosses in another family, then another. Each year old man Carrefax directs his students and children in a pageant cribbed from the classics. One year it's the primal patricide. (Earth Mother Gaia persuades Cronos to castrate his father; little Serge, playing Cronos, wanders in need of a scythe.) Another year it's Persephone's abduction by the lord of the dead. Sophie takes charge of the special effects and Serge is Ascalaphus, who witnesses Persephone's fateful indulgence in pomegranate seeds. An errant player places Hades' crown on Widsun's head. Later that night, Serge sees the shadow of a copulating couple cast on a sheet by a lantern. (Plato's cave, anyone?) Not long thereafter, Sophie, pregnant, goes mad and swallows poison.

If this sounds familiar from undergrad psychology seminars, recall Freud's Wolf Man, who provides yet another set of mythic resonances. Sergei Pankajev, like our Serge, was born with a caul (another *C*) and seduced as a boy by a brilliant, scientifically inclined older sister who loved Lepidoptera and later took her life. And Serge, like Pankajev, allowed himself to feel no grief at this loss; instead he buried it and came to suffer for this original encryptment. But in McCarthy's fictions, unlike in Freud's case study, no primal scene unlocks the secrets of the symbolic order. Behind every sign is another sign, an intersection in a web of linked associations. Meaning, such as it is, lies scattered across the network.

C stands also for "carbon," the associative superhero of the periodic table, the basis for all known life, the substance of the sludge that we will all become, akin in its blackness to ink and to void, to "the distance between planets, the space across which signals travel." Black gook coats the pages of *C*, and not just the actual ink. Having fallen ill after Sophie's death—like Pankajev he suffers from constipation and blurry vision—teenage Serge takes the waters at a Balkan spa. His Mittel-European doctor diagnoses "morbid matter…black bile: *mela chole*." Serge is not the only one. World War I is right around the corner. "Blood of Europe poisoned and cathectic," the doctor declares. "All have clouded vision, just like you."

The war arrives. Serge befriends it. He is trained in cartography and codes and sent up in a plane, not as a pilot but as an "observer" tasked with transmitting the coordinates of German batteries to artillery on the ground. His companions, nearly all of whom are killed, are terrified of enemy gunfire, of becoming "a flamer, *carbonisé*." Not Serge: "The idea that his flesh could melt and fuse with the machine parts pleases him." Archetypal Modernist that he is, he reads Hölderlin between flights (the others wallow in A.E. Housman) and loves flying with a technophilic glee right out of a Marinetti manifesto. He loves the staticky crackle of gunfire, the vapor trails that cross the sky like wires, the way flight flattens perspective and tears away the earth's horizon line. He loves watching the sun drown each evening in the marshes and imagines himself "a new, tar-coated orb around which all things turn."

> For all its ingenuity and elegance, *C* at times feels too straightforwardly polemical.

Things do happen in *C*. Serge has adventures. Characters die, travel, go off to war, get laid—no one exactly falls in love—but you couldn't call the novel plot-driven. There are no hooks really, except the most basic mysteries of meaning. What suspense McCarthy provides is driven more by the momentum of his language and the layered elegance of his ideas than by events. Midway through the war section, Serge returns from a mission and finds the recording officer waiting for him with a stack of papers. "Narrative, Carrefax," the officer reminds him.

"What?" asks Serge.

C also stands for cocaine, which the flyers rub in their eyes to sharpen their vision. Serge learns it's more fun to snort the stuff, that it heightens the associative reveries to which he's already given. Among the squadron's medical supplies he discovers diacetylmorphine—also known as heroin and, in the US street slang of the day, "sister"—and soon can't fly without it. The war's horrors register at a dulled, aesthetic distance: "detached arms semaphore quite randomly across the ground; torsos, cut off at the waist, mimic the statues of antiquity."

The war ends. Serge survives. He studies architecture in London, a task made difficult by his peculiarly Modernist handicap: an inability to render perspective, to perceive depth, to see the world as anything other than surface, veil, dark ribbon unspooling across time. It doesn't help his study habits that he falls in with an actress who teaches him how to score cocaine and its slow sister, to decode the secret languages of postwar London's demimonde. The postwar section is called "Crash" for a reason, but even as Serge unravels, he is affectless, flat as a map. He is, as Freud said of Pankajev, "unassailably entrenched behind an attitude of obliging apathy." If you're still holding out for catharsis, for some moral or sentimental breakthrough, McCarthy makes it clear that you won't get one.

When the Architectural Association's provost, Burnet, tries to empathize with Serge for all he must have suffered, Serge protests that he enjoyed the war. Burnet, stunned, searches Serge's face for some more soothing explanation, but, McCarthy writes, "Burnet and his like will never disinter what's buried there, will never elevate or train it; Serge hasn't made himself available for his team, never will." Neither, McCarthy implies, will he.

C stands for many other things besides, but let's stop with "crypt," a word McCarthy has great fun with, implying as it does both burial and coded speech. The novel's final section finds Serge in Egypt, dispatched by Widsun, his godfather and guardian angel, now an imperial spymaster of sorts. The postwar scramble for hegemony is on, and the British Empire is showing cracks. Egypt is on the cusp of independence. The Brits are packing up but at the same time planning for another, less material form of domination. They're building pylons for the Empire Wireless Chain, a new empire in the air. Pause to note, as McCarthy does, that a pylon can be either a radio tower or the gate to an ancient Egyptian temple, a doorway to the underworld, and that Serge is soon nicknamed "Pylon Man." Empire, death and technology all walk hand in hand.

Serge travels south, and into the past. He starts in Alexandria, "where it all began,"

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exploring the layers of the city's history with a Cavafy-like polymath named Petrou. Soon he's dispatched up the Nile on a river journey that evokes both *Heart of Darkness* and *The Confidence-Man*. Everyone on board is spying for someone, or might as well be. Even Serge isn't sure if he's a spy or not. He has reports to write, but what about? He ends up in the cemetery complex of Sedment. ("This is where it all began," he stands corrected. "Alexandria is where it *ended*.") The book's hallucinatory climax begins within and under a pyramid, with beetles, scarabs and bones scattered all about. The walls are smeared with bitumen.

Freud used Egypt as a metaphor for the psyche, "which is so unintelligible to us because it preserves the earlier stages of its development side by side with the end-products, retains the most ancient gods and their significations along with the most modern ones." For McCarthy, the Upper Nile is not just Serge's unconscious. It's modernity. It's us. It's where signification explodes in its own endless echo. Sedment becomes sediment. One could complain about Orientalism here, a charge McCarthy does his best to pre-empt. He parodies the imperialist myopia of Serge's colonial acquaintances ("The home of Egyptology is London," one huffs. "What's Cairo got to do with any of this?") and describes Egyptology—and by extension all modes of knowing—as a history of looking that in its arrogance assumes it is "somehow definitive, standing outside of the long history of which it merely forms another chapter." Self-consciousness, though, does not get him off the hook.

One could also kvetch about its cerebral pleasures, *C* suffers from a certain lack of playfulness. It's not that Serge is a cipher; it's that he's not quite cipher enough. He's too overdetermined a symbol, and one that signifies too precisely. What's wanting is not sentiment or realism but mess, ferment, a bubbling over in excess of the rhetorical lines. Despite McCarthy's insistence on semiotic flux, the novel's myriad puzzle pieces snap smartly into place, as if chaos had been chalked out with a T square or the eternal recurrence of counterfeits managed by a central bank. The message—that all meaning recedes into static—can come in just a little too clear. So clear that it can be hard to hear the weird, whimsical songs of the static itself.

For all its ingenuity and elegance, *C* at times feels too straightforwardly polemical, as if McCarthy had internalized the false dichotomy that Zadie Smith mapped out at his expense, as if he felt his chosen literary path required illumination, landscaping, cobblestones and even asphalt. (To be fair, Smith's folly has also been John Barth's, Jonathan Franzen's and Ben Marcus's, all of whom have variously insisted on analogous bifurcations for a form whose greatest virtue from the beginning has been its flexibility, its slippery resistance to all imposed confinements.) In his best moments, his offhand jests and visionary riffs, McCarthy writes with well-earned swagger, confident that the novel—not just this novel but any novel, *the novel*—is expansive enough to hold whatever he might wish to stuff it with, as if it needed no justification save the freedoms that it claimed.

It feels worse than petty, though, to fault McCarthy for his control. He has written an extraordinarily smart, complex and entertaining novel, a real rarity. Amid all the hair-pulling about the death of the book and literature's grim future—topics with which McCarthy is in constant if subtextual conversation—this novel, at least, is alive and unafraid of its mortality. Even as it declares the demise of literature's most ancient hopes, from pylon to pylon *C* positively hums. ■

Fame Is a Bee

by HEATHER HENDERSHOT

Talk Show
Confrontations, Pointed Commentary, and Off-Screen Secrets.
By Dick Cavett.
Times Books. 279 pp. $25.

When Merv Griffin died in 2007, the lion's share of obituaries emphasized his game-show empire. Griffin created *Wheel of Fortune* and *Jeopardy!* and profited handsomely from both. Today the proliferation of branded global entertainment tailored to local needs is rampant, particularly with reality shows like *Big Brother* and *Survivor*. But international versions of *Wheel* proliferated ten years before the premiere of *Survivor*, and in 1986 Coca-Cola bought Merv Griffin Enterprises for $250 million, making Griffin one of the most successful and forward-looking entertainment producers in the United States. Yet the average TV viewer saw Griffin in a different light: he was simply "Merv," one of the most popular talk-show hosts in the country.

Looking back, it's a bit hard to believe. Merv was dull. In fact, *SCTV*'s Rick Moranis's faultless impersonation of him—and his signature sycophantic exclamation, "Fascinating!"—could make watching the real *Merv Griffin Show* seem pointless. Chat host Mike Douglas was too humdrum even for parody. He and Merv were easygoing, always wearing relaxed smiles and never offending or browbeating their guests. There was one major difference, though. Merv understood himself as a celebrity (or, at least, as a hanger-on) and would casually mention that he had played tennis with Errol Flynn, or had sublet an apartment from Marlon Brando, or that Marilyn Monroe had once jumped up and down on his bed sans foundation garments. Douglas—the "national icon of square chic," as Rick Perlstein puts it in *Nixonland*—presented himself more as an everyman, an afternoon guest at your coffee klatch who just happened to bring along some swell friends.

Somehow Douglas summoned the nerve to invite John Lennon and Yoko Ono to co-host for a week in 1972. The three discussed topics ranging from racism and women's lib to biofeedback and macrobiotic cooking, and their guests included Bobby Seale, Jerry Rubin and Ralph Nader. It was a ratings coup, but Douglas noted in his autobiography that he had been quite anxious the whole time. He was no doubt worried that his guests were too controversial to appear uninvited in America's living rooms, but he was damn lucky his own live studio audience did not rise up in revolt upon hearing his Velveeta-smooth performance of "Michelle." Douglas had been the singing voice of Prince Charming in Disney's *Cinderella*. Edgy he was not.

Mercifully, Merv sang less than Douglas, though he did sometimes perform a punchy rendition of "I've Got a Lovely Bunch of Coconuts," his one and only hit, from 1950. He devoted a whole program to examining Transcendental Meditation, but countercultural figures like Yoko Ono were not among his guests. At heart, Merv was dedicated to interviewing an older generation of entertainers, the glamorous Hollywood stars. Unfortunately, he didn't have anything particularly interesting to ask

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them. To Sophia Loren, he posed the question "Do emotions like bitterness and hate show on one's face?" When an obstreperous Richard Burton opined that humankind had made no progress in 2,500 years and that the astronauts who walked on the moon were complete idiots, Merv was flummoxed and tried to smooth things over by asking, with all the finesse of a can of Glade air freshener, "Who were your heroes growing up?"

Merv did have an eye for stand-up comic talent, and he took credit for discovering Jerry Seinfeld. (*Seinfeld* paid homage to Merv in a final-season episode in which Kramer installs the set of *The Merv Griffin Show* in his living room.) Both Richard Pryor and George Carlin appeared on Griffin's show in the '60s and were brilliant. Merv let funny guys be funny and political figures of all stripes run through their talking points unchallenged. Martin Luther King Jr. explained why economic disparities between Negroes and whites persisted and why the war in Vietnam was a mistake. Ronald Reagan rather outrageously proclaimed that no other administration had ever done so much for women's issues. Merv has been praised (perhaps mostly by himself) for daring to ask Nixon in 1967 how he could overcome the wide perception that he was "a loser." But this question was the elephant in the room and, really, exactly the one Nixon wanted, since he was, once again, trying to invent a New Nixon. One year later Nixon would steal away a young *Mike Douglas Show* producer—one Roger Ailes—to package the New Nixon for the media. A few years earlier, Nixon had hired a writer from *The Jack Paar Program* to craft jokes for his speeches. If Nixon was headhunting talent from talk-shows, he obviously felt that these folks knew how to speak to "the average American."

Dick Cavett (left) and Jack Paar on *The Dick Cavett Show*, December 18, 1972 AP

It's hardly surprising that politicians were eager to appeal to the talk-show audience, for this was Middle America in a nutshell. In an era when ABC, NBC and CBS were the only game in town, most TV shows were designed to appeal to the widest possible audience. It was an age of "water cooler TV," when almost everyone in the office could be counted on to have seen the same folks interviewed the night before. And the first late-night personality to really tap into the sensibility of the water cooler crowd was Jack Paar.

Host of *The Tonight Show* from 1957 to 1962, Paar was generally considered the inventor of the "desk and couch" format of the American talk-show. He had a notable talent for making people feel at ease, treating new kids on the block like the Smothers Brothers with the same respect he showed Bette Davis. Earnest and upright, Paar was sharp but not intellectual. He was too polite to ask pointed questions of his guests, but he was an astute conversationalist. Watching the show was like going to a cocktail party, back in the days when crinolines and cuff links were worn without irony. Paar noted in the opening monologue to a special 1964 London-based episode of *The Jack Paar Program*, "It is almost impossible to dislike me because I do nothing." Paar wasn't just being modest. He was also responding to TV critics who regularly griped that he lacked talent. Paar was visibly hurt by unkind reviews, and he earned a reputation for sincerity and unvarnished emotion. A typical show shot in NBC's New York City studio would open with a Paar monologue on a theme like modern advertising, then might feature a pretty singer warbling a ballad from *Oliver!*, a comedian like regular Jonathan Winters doing his sissified version of *Moby-Dick*, a relaxed exchange of stories with Arthur Godfrey and finally, for a touch of class, Richard Burton reciting Churchill's "Iron Curtain" speech. Most shows, though somewhat improvised, went off without a hitch, with Paar as impresario, genuinely cracking up and not afraid to let his guests be more entertaining than he was.

By the late 1960s, with Griffin's program chugging along profitably, Paar having gone into early retirement and Johnny Carson at the helm of *The Tonight Show* favoring comedy over serious discussion (he had impeccable timing and was the only one in the bunch to have a feel for physical comedy), American talk-shows seemed to have settled into a consistent formula: the ideal show had a fast pace, a variety of guests to please a wide range of viewers, and a little vavoom, but nothing too saucy. Between the sketches and songs, the underlying purpose of many of the pre–cable era talk-shows was to probe, though often very gently, at what made real famous people famous: great acting, superior political strategizing, athletic accomplishments, the ability to make people laugh until they cried. Notwithstanding the appearance of an occasional novelty guest—the contortionist, nose flautist or snake wrangler—these shows rarely ventured beyond fame into the realm of pseudofame. Unlike, say, Paris Hilton, the guests on early talk-shows were people with skill sets. The ratings kiss of death was the "has been," for the very presence of such a guest would reveal a painful reality: fame floats like a butterfly and flees like a bee. There were always tell-almost-all star autobiographies to promote, and gimmicky self-help manuals, but otherwise there wasn't much room for writers as guests on talk-shows. The network suits assumed that the mass audience was uninterested in anything that smacked of the highbrow. An actor doing Shakespeare on Carson's show was likely to get a pie in the face. Then *The Dick Cavett Show* threw a wrench into the works. Finally, a talk-show for eggheads.

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On *Cavett*, Carson's corny sketch comedy, Douglas's feel-good vibe and Griffin's bland boosterism were banished. Absent, too, was Paar's open emotion. Cavett admitted to "loathing the kind of phony emotion so common on TV," and in his restraint he often projected cool detachment, though he almost always maintained a humorous tone. Yet it's clear from the stories he tells in his three books, *Cavett* (1974), *Eye on Cavett* (1983)—both written with Christopher Porterfield—and his new book, *Talk Show*, that he was anything but emotionally detached from stars. In fact, the story of his life is dominated by a fascination with the idea of fame, his own and others'.

A talk-show like Cavett's, intelligent but not intellectual, offered a new twist.

As a young man from Nebraska, attending Yale on scholarship, Cavett was in awe of the glamour of live TV. By the time his first talk-show premiered on ABC in 1968, American intellectuals had come to disparage TV as the "tube," the "idiot box," the "vast wasteland"; but in the 1950s they had not yet given up on it. As a student in those years, Cavett would often travel to New York City to attend Broadway and TV performances. He had a talent for sneaking backstage and finagling his way into an audience with actors. He also enjoyed spotting celebrities on the street and had a particular talent for identifying character actors. Anyone could pick out Marlon Brando in a crowd, but Franklin Pangborn? That took a more discriminating eye. It was not enough to spot the famous (or even the slightly famous); you had to talk to them too. Once he was famous Cavett expressed irritation at being approached by complete strangers, yet as an unknown he had had a knack for ingratiating himself with celebrities without alarming them.

After some years of wangling jobs as a TV extra and working as a copy boy at *Time*, Cavett landed a job with Jack Paar. He secured the position by boldly entering the RCA Building by a back elevator and hanging out in the corridor between Paar's dressing room and the bathroom. Inevitably, nature called, Paar appeared and Cavett passed him some monologue jokes he had written. He eventually wrote for Carson, Griffin and the short-lived *Jerry Lewis Show*. Cavett also developed a stand-up routine, with advice from his sometimes-mentor, Groucho Marx, to whom he'd introduced himself on the street in 1961, just moments after George S. Kaufman's funeral. His default shtick was the incongruity between his Yale education and his simple Nebraska origins, though he was not above a good one-liner. On Chinese-German restaurants Cavett opined, "The food is delicious. The only problem is, an hour later you're hungry for power."

Cavett eventually secured his own ABC show called *This Morning*, soon renamed *Dick*. His first guests were Angela Lansbury, Muhammad Ali and Gore Vidal. ABC was disgusted and told him, "Nobody in the world wants to hear what Gore Vidal or Muhammad Ali thinks about the Vietnam war." Scheduled from 10:30 to noon, the show had trouble finding its audience. (In a letter to Cavett, Groucho lamented that the time slot doomed it to be a "desperation show," watched only by "angry housewives and people who are unemployable.") Cavett's next venue was a ninety-minute late-night talk-show on the same network. He recalled some years later that Paar had advised him at the time, "Don't ever do an interview. Ever. That means clipboards and 'What's your favorite color?' and David Frost.... Make it a conversation." Cavett took the advice to heart and engaged in real discussions, not the canned five-minute exchanges and product plugs so common on talk-shows past and present. On the *Late Show With David Letterman*, almost every interaction reeks of the "pre-interview" in which talking points are plotted out in advance. "So, have you been working out?" is followed by a generally unconvincing "Yes, the funniest thing happened to me at the gym last week!" This kind of canned banter was anathema to Cavett.

He was also unique for not pretending political neutrality. Cavett was openly (if not flamingly) liberal and even hosted an Emmy Award–winning TV special called *VD Blues*. Negative comments about Vietnam and Nixon were welcome on Cavett's show, and he even testified in John Lennon's defense at his deportation hearing, which particularly irked the commander in chief. (The Nixon tapes include an exchange in which the president asks his chief of staff how they can "screw" Cavett.) In an era when most talk-shows kept the chitchat apolitical, guests on Cavett were free to make feminist and prochoice comments. In fact, in the interest of fairness and balance, ABC demanded that Cavett give L. Brent Bozell "equal time" to express the antiabortion perspective. Cavett told Bozell on the air: "I don't know which I find more repellent, your manner or your ideas." He told Timothy Leary, "I really think you're full of crap," and he so offended segregationist Lester Maddox that the Georgia governor walked off the show.

If Cavett occasionally ruffled his guests' feathers, it was in the course of genuine discussion. This was very different from the three-ring circus of insults common on today's more confrontational talk-shows (or, more aptly, shouting, crying and chair-throwing shows). Such shenanigans were seen as improper in the pre-cable days. When Norman Mailer vented his contempt for fellow guest Gore Vidal on a famous 1971 *Dick Cavett* episode, a third guest, Janet Flanner (*aka New Yorker* regular "Genêt"), told Mailer in no uncertain terms that his manner was boorish and, even worse, boring.

Such personal animosities surfaced only infrequently on the show, but Cavett wasn't afraid of spirited debate. Nor was he loath to ask guests slightly uncomfortable questions. He may not have pried too far into the most private details of people's lives, but he also did not limit himself to making guests look good—Mike Douglas's overt strategy. In some cases, specialists explained a new scientific endeavor or discovery; here, personal issues were irrelevant. Other times, conversation was light and fun. A 1970 show featuring Rex Reed, Mel Brooks, a PR flack from the MPAA ratings board and the young stars of *Zabriskie Point*, Mark Frechette and Daria Halprin, offered a little of everything: comic routines, discussion of the politics of the Oscars, debate over film censorship and Cavett at his best, not trying too hard to pun and improvise punch lines, as he often did, but instead reacting hilariously to Frechette and Halprin's slow-witted nonresponses to his questions, while Brooks desperately pleaded, "Say something!"

The finest shows on the *Cavett* DVDs currently available are those that feature an incongruous group of guests eager to engage in a genuine conversation. Janis Joplin, Chet Huntley, Raquel Welch and Douglas Fairbanks Jr. on the same dais? Fantastic! Cavett asks about the current status of Hollywood glamour. Fairbanks responds like a businessman: the studios used to promote stars, but now, following

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the collapse of the studio system, stars have to promote themselves. Joplin provides the countercultural perspective: people want authenticity, not glamour; that's why they are drawn to Dennis Hopper. Welch worries about improprieties: why are journalists focusing on Hopper's personal life instead of his tremendous talent? Huntley, drooling over Welch, adds nothing much. The conversation is natural and compelling, and it also engages with a recurrent motif of the entire series, concern about the death of the old Hollywood and the evolution of the entertainment business. Not surprisingly, the old contract players are the ones most concerned about the decline of glamour and the rise of a realism—and sexual frankness—that they find most unpalatable. Bette Davis comments on the new naturalism: "I could never ad-lib. I don't believe in it." Debbie Reynolds observes, "Things are going a little too nudie for me," while Groucho proclaims, "I think women are sexy when they've got their clothes on. And if later they take them off, then you've triumphed." Old Hollywood and new—as represented on one show by Robert Altman, Mel Brooks, Frank Capra and Peter Bogdanovich—are deeply concerned about the large conglomerates running Hollywood in the wake of the decline of the old moguls. "I despise…that Kinney Parking Lots are making movies," Brooks declares.

When Cavett was able to devote a whole program to a single star, he often got more serious. Groucho just told funny stories and sang "Lydia the Tattooed Lady," but Carol Burnett, Kate Hepburn and others were willing to reveal something of their private selves. In these cases, Cavett inquired about childhood experiences, Freud and his couch hovering just off camera. He asked about the secrets of good acting, writing or comedy. He wanted to get inside. Paar was too polite to attempt such a thing, Douglas liked to stay closer to the surface to keep things upbeat and Griffin may well have held back out of a deep conviction that privacy was sacrosanct. Cavett was able to push harder, in part, because of his low-key delivery style, although sometimes he would lose his way, becoming too nervous or star-struck. He regrettably fills a gap in his conversation with Burnett by complimenting her on her legs, and he never pushes Alfred Hitchcock beyond the formulaic, giving the director free rein to make misogynist quips: "Somebody asked me the other day how long did I think nudity would last on the screen… I said that all breasts sag eventually." Yet Cavett holds his own when Brando declines to answer almost every question, and one feels that one knows both characters a bit better at the end of the convoluted interview.

Cavett disdained the tube's more lowbrow content. In his first book he used *Let's Make a Deal* as shorthand for all that was idiotic on TV. Nothing could be worse than people dressed up like hamburgers and radishes, he lamented. Needless to say, someone with this attitude could not survive on network TV over the long term, though Cavett's Emmys carried enough prestige for ABC to stick with him until 1975, when the show was finally canceled. The question is not so much why an intelligent show was killed—it happens all the time. *My So-Called Life*, *Freaks and Geeks* and, most recently, *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* all come to mind. Rather, why would ABC run a show targeting brainiacs (albeit brainiacs with a keen sense of humor) for seven years?

Established in 1943, ABC came on the scene late as the third network. ABC had long been TV's underdog, because NBC and CBS had licenses for all the best viewing areas, and ABC shows simply weren't accessible to as many people. ABC was particularly open to airing a variety of public affairs programs, often produced by others, because its own news division was wobbly, and talk-shows were a lightweight version of public affairs shows, providing a balanced roster of politicians, entertainers and self-improvement gurus—all at a reasonably low cost. Talk-shows were often pablum, but the very fact that they were unscripted nonfiction gave them an air of authenticity. A talk-show like Cavett's, intelligent but not intellectual, offered an interesting new twist. Why not?

But could such a show make money? By the mid-1950s, ABC had found success cranking out westerns and had forged a lucrative deal to air *Disneyland*. This all appealed to a mass audience. The "class" audience presumably earned more income than the mass and was potentially more appealing to advertisers, but could this

Emily Dickinson Came to Earth and Then She Left

your sweaty party dress and my sweaty party dress lasted a few minutes until the tomato was gone some day they will disambiguate you but not while I'm around our species won Emily we won it feels so good to be winning the flame of victory pass it around it never goes out dinosaurs ruled Massachusetts dinosaurs fucking and laying eggs in Amherst Boston Mount Holyoke then you appeared high priestess pulling it out of the goddamned garden with both hands you Emily remembered the first time comprehending a struck match can spread a flame it feels good to win this fair and square protest my assessment all you want but not needing to dream is like not needing to see the world awaken to itself indestructible epiphanies consume the path and just because you're having fun doesn't mean you're not going to die recrimination is the fruit to defy with unexpected appetite I will be your outsider if that's how you need me electric company's stupid threatening letters cannot affect a poet who has faced death

C.A. CONRAD

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advantage trump sheer numbers? *The Dick Cavett Show* simply wasn't designed to appeal to everyone. It did feature Kirk Douglas, Lucille Ball and Fred Astaire, but there were also more lettered guests like Gore Vidal, Saul Bellow and, when the fancy struck him, Cavett's favorite undergraduate philosophy professor from Yale. This was niche programming *avant la lettre*. ABC was onto something, perhaps, but narrowcast programming was doomed in the pre-cable world, finding only an occasional home for itself late at night, far from the advertising rates of primetime. Late night was a dead zone where weird '70s shows like *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*; *SCTV*; and *Fernwood 2-Night* could make brief appearances. Before cable, niche TV could exist only at the edges of the schedule; and even there, some money had to be made. If *Mary Hartman* managed to air in a few markets when people were actually awake, it was only because its developer, Norman Lear, bypassed the networks, syndicated the program and negotiated directly with local stations. Lear was a powerful producer who briefly managed to beat the system. Cavett would have no such luck.

Cavett's first book includes sad stories about meetings with ABC executives who demanded higher ratings yet had never even watched their star's show. Cavett says he began "to get a faint whiff of goose cooking" when he walked into the office and spotted a photo of the executive on vacation with Monty Hall. This kind of fellow just wasn't staying up late to listen to interesting discussions of literature, film and politics. There's an even sadder story in *Eye on Cavett*. After the cancellation of the ABC program, Fred Silverman, then at CBS, put Cavett under an eighteen-month exclusive contract with the idea of testing him in different venues to see what would stick. Silverman would make Cavett "a household word." Shortly thereafter, Silverman jumped ship for ABC, and Cavett was left adrift as various executives groped about to discern what kind of household word he would become. What finally emerged was a dreadful summer variety show in which Cavett was forced to tap dance and do sketch comedy, anathema to a performer who thrived on spontaneous conversation. In gruesome detail, Cavett explains how the writers and executives mucked up the entire endeavor, in effect trying to dress up Cavett like a radish. It is a tortuous tale of incompetence.

From 1977 to 1982, Cavett would find a home on PBS, a more hospitably bookish climate than the networks, before receding in large part from the public view, although he did appear on Broadway in the early 2000s as narrator of *The Rocky Horror Show*. He made a guest appearance as himself on *The Simpsons* in 1995—a key marker of cultural cachet—and has written a *New York Times* online editorial column since 2007. Of course, narrowcast media have finally won out, and with his *Times* blog Cavett has found his way back to a niche following of fans who appreciate plentiful Shakespeare references and highfalutin words like "horripilate," "lagniappe" and "adenoidal" and don't need to interrupt their reading to Google luminaries such as Mort Sahl, Don Rickles, Fred Allen, Jack Benny, Soupy Sales and Milton Berle.

Cavett's new book, *Talk Show*, offers a selection of some three years of blog entries. Unfortunately, his hodgepodge comments on why the Iraq War is a disaster, pronunciation errors are irksome and obesity is bad are not particularly revelatory. His stories about celebrities are often recaps, or simply reiterations, of stories told in his previous books, though a few descriptions of shows not available on DVD do whet one's appetite for more. Who would have guessed there would be a fine rapport between Tony Randall and Bobby Fischer?

The conversations on display on Cavett's show, besides offering a window on the celebrities, politics and culture of the late 1960s and early '70s, at the height of the monolithic network era, also provide a frame of reference for understanding the dominance of talk in today's fragmented media marketplace. For, notwithstanding all the tawdry action featured on reality TV—Hugh Hefner's girlfriends planning theme parties, Sharon Osbourne lobbing a ham into her neighbor's yard, randy nobodies hooking up in hot tubs—talk is what really drives today's "unscripted" shows: therapeutic talk, instructional talk, strategic talk, trash talk. With their endless betrayals, plot reversals and love triangles, these newfangled shows are deeply indebted to the soap opera tradition. Equally important, though, is their debt to the talk-show and to the very old idea that it is interesting to watch celebrities—perfect strangers, really—reveal what makes them tick, in a putatively "natural" manner, without a script. Cavett's guests, following his lead, did this quite brilliantly much of the time. Bette Davis may not have ad-libbed in the movies, but on Cavett's stage, decked out in go-go boots, a fur capelet and diamonds, she spoke off the cuff and was absolutely brilliant. Creating a comfortable space for all kinds of guests to talk about politics, culture and fame, Cavett gave us both the moon and the stars. ■

Voids and Jackasses

by STUART KLAWANS

In the tradition of *Triumph of the Will*, the early Oscar contender *127 Hours* splits cinematic space into discrete zones—one for a resolute hero looming in close-up, the other for faraway, cheering masses—mediated only by a sublime void. The void in this case is the unpopulated immensity of Utah's Canyonlands National Park. The masses are you, me and everyone else in the movie theater (assuming we follow the on-screen promptings—such as images of crowds at sports events—and burst on cue into applause). As for the real-life hero (admittedly a much nicer guy than Hitler), he is Aron Ralston, who in 2003 went hiking alone in Canyonlands, accidentally got pinned deep inside a tunnel of wind-eroded rock and at last freed himself, on the sixth day, by cutting off his right forearm just below the elbow.

Ralston has given his account of this ordeal in the book *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*. For purposes of emotional uplift, his story has now been rewritten by Danny Boyle and Simon Beaufoy (the team responsible for *Slumdog Millionaire*) and directed with Riefenstahlian brio by Boyle, with the actor of the moment, James Franco, taking the role of Ralston.

This is a film of challenges: for Franco, who had to put himself through agony, fear, delirium, fatigue and berserker abandon, while remaining immobilized and at all times likable; for Boyle, who needed to open up a story that was locked in a narrow, all-but-sunless rift in the earth; and for viewers, who know that the price of a ticket buys a front-row seat to an amputation. That's the whole point of watching *127 Hours*. Just as Ralston survived his blood-and-iron experience to emerge a better man, so are you invited to endure this moralized *Petit Guignol* and come out tingling with admiration for the human spirit—or, to be more accurate,

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the spirit of one very determined man.

The fictionalized Ralston delivers the moral directly, through lines he speaks to himself and the audience. He should not have gone hiking solo without notifying anyone. He should not have prided himself on being the self-reliant strongman. But narrative arcs speak louder than words, and this arc tells you to stand up and cheer, because Ralston is the superman of self-reliance. As for those friends and family members in whom he should have confided: who are they, anyhow? Flashbacks and fantasies show you a father and mother with no distinguishing characteristics, a past girlfriend of impeccably pretty blondness, a younger sister from the younger-sister factory. Did Ralston know these figures, or did he just glimpse them while leafing through a magazine? Impossible to say. The sole relationship the movie successfully establishes for him is the one with himself, or rather with the video camera on which he records his trials. A fit protagonist for a Danny Boyle film: someone who knows everything about capturing images and nothing about people.

Something is missing in the sublime void of *127 Hours*. To identify it, you need only watch another current movie about the foolhardy adventures that some men undertake, and the physical sufferings they overcome: *Jackass 3D*. No one has yet called this picture an Oscar contender; but it is most likely the ultimate achievement of the lucrative documentary series, dedicated to proving that obscene and violent practical jokes are funniest when they're self-inflicted.

Despite *The Nation*'s history of reporting about warfare, torture, lynching and rape, I hesitate to describe in these pages the shenanigans perpetrated in *Jackass 3D*. It's enough to say that the movie matches *127 Hours* in both its fascination with bodily fluids and its belief that the natural world exists to serve as a testing ground. With regard to the first trait, *Jackass* is perhaps the first 3D movie to excite the audience not only by illusionistically hurling objects out of the screen but also by directing a stream into it. As for the second trait, *Jackass 3D* includes potentially fatal encounters with several buffaloes, a bull, a donkey, bees, scorpions, an unamused ram and a rooting pig. What the pig is rooting for, and where the treat is located, I need not discuss. The point is, the cast members approach wildlife as if it were not wild and then howl with pain—and laughter—when nature behaves like itself.

"Well, what did you think was gonna happen?" asks one *Jackass* prankster of another, after his buddy has undergone the latest predictable disaster. Perhaps someone might have put the same question to Aron Ralston. But nobody's around to talk to him until very late in *127 Hours*—and then these other people serve merely as support personnel, not interlocutors. The cast members of *Jackass 3D*, by contrast, constitute a society. It might not be a society to which you would want to belong; but it's a very companionable one, where people share their willful idiocy, cheer themselves on as a group and roar with appreciation at one another's injuries.

Let me be clear: I am neither urging you to spend your money on *Jackass 3D* nor trying to dissuade you from seeing *127 Hours*. The first picture you might not sit through even for free, while the second you would recognize as a notable feat of filmmaking. But, to phrase it differently, *127 Hours* is a stunt movie, just like *Jackass 3D*. Both take stunts as their subject matter and were made as stunts in themselves. An evocative word, that. Nobody is sure of its etymology, but people speculate that it comes from the German *Stunde*, meaning an hour or a lesson.

If I had to choose between stunts, I'd say I learned more from my time with the jackasses.

CHUCK ZLOTNICK

James Franco as Aron Ralston in *127 Hours*

Clint Eastwood has long been interested in ghosts and revenants of the avenging kind, as you may see from *Pale Rider*, *Hang 'Em High* and even *Unforgiven*. From certain broad hints in *Mystic River* and *Gran Torino*, you may also guess that Eastwood is not much interested in the consolations of religion. So it's not surprising that when he set himself to make *Hereafter*, a movie about intimations of a nondenominational, do-gooder ghost world, the only parts that turned out to be convincing were the eruptions of violence and the sly dirty jokes.

The opening eruption, which leaves the rest of the movie limp in its wake, is a special-effects extravaganza, in which a tsunami roars across a tropical resort island, sweeping a visiting French journalist (Cécile de France) to her temporary death. The flood is vivid, detailed, tactile and unforgettable. So too is the journalist's recovery, which involves vomiting perhaps a quart of water. So much the worse, then, for her brief intervening glimpse of the Beyond: a cloudy, color-drained nonplace streaked with dark, out-of-focus figures.

Though it's a perfect yawn, this myopic's afterlife disturbs and obsesses the journalist. It also holds sway—a vague, cloudy sway—over a lonely, sensitive but hunky factory worker in San Francisco played by Matt Damon (once again cast as the ordinary guy with extraordinary powers). He is, reluctantly, a spirit medium, who establishes a "connection" whenever he touches someone's hand. The slightest brush of the fingertips

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will white out the screen and start those blurred people chattering, as they do when he flirts with a comely new acquaintance (Bryce Dallas Howard) and lets her get too close. The inevitable question—which I assume the roguish Eastwood meant to raise—is whether *Hereafter* would turn into the last reel of *Ghostbusters* if this guy ever had sex.

Unfortunately, the answer is no. As Peter Morgan's screenplay labors to bring the factory worker together with the journalist—and with a solemn-faced schoolboy in London, who is off on a spook hunt of his own—the ghosts of *Hereafter* prove to be unfailingly helpful and sincere (you'd think nobody but Canadians ever died), while the mortals' world resolves into post-tsunami tidiness. Medical conferences take place outdoors with the Alps as background. Editorial meetings require floor-to-ceiling windows looking out onto the Eiffel Tower. Welfare caseworkers are kind and efficient (something novel in an Eastwood movie), and factory layoffs provide a wonderful opportunity for personal growth.

A movie that began with smashing turmoil ends in a flood of niceness. This flood has now been completed by an outpouring of uncritical praise for *Hereafter*. It seems as if Eastwood is so venerable that his films are simply assumed to be good, especially when the shadow of his mortality falls over them. I, too, admire America's last classical moviemaker. But just because I want to see him alive and active doesn't mean I can pretend that *Hereafter* is anything but dead.

Short Takes: It's no *Norma Rae*, but if you've been longing for a rousing movie about women factory workers standing up for their rights, *Made in Dagenham* is coming to the theaters. Based on the experiences of Rita O'Grady and 186 others at the huge Ford plant that once operated in Dagenham, England, the film dramatizes how these women went on strike in 1968 (against the wishes of their union leaders, and in many cases their husbands) and eventually won legislation guaranteeing equal pay for equal work. The script's exposition, by William Ivory, might as well have been written on picket signs, and the work behind the camera by Nigel Cole is an object lesson in why directors matter (compare the perfect professionalism of Sally Hawkins as Cole's Rita with her brilliance in Mike Leigh's *Happy-Go-Lucky*). *Made in Dagenham* could have been a lot better; but it's good to have it here at all.

From Estonia, once the front line of ideological struggle between the Soviet bloc and the West, comes *Disco and Atomic War*, an absurdist documentary by Jaak Kilmi and Kiur Aarma about growing up as fans of forbidden Finnish television. The Finnish broadcast towers, you see, used to beam *Dallas* and *Knight Rider* across the gulf to Tallinn, so that impressionable Estonian youths became corrupted by images of fast cars, free-flowing whiskey and slinky cocktail gowns—this, despite the Soviets' vigorous efforts to block the signal and despite the impossibility of buying an Estonian television set capable of receiving the frequency. (There was a brisk black market in homemade converters.) Kilmi and Aarma tell this true story through a mixture of the actual (archival footage and interviews) and the fanciful (composite stories, fictional re-enactments and very, very cheap animations). I believe, though I'm not sure, that the interview with a walrus-mustached Estonian inventor is real. Dissatisfied with conventional television antennas, which did not perform well when concealed indoors, he devised a more powerful antenna using a mercury thermometer. It worked fine, except that it jammed his neighbors' sets and also the telemetry system at a nearby missile base, which led to some tense moments that have inspired the film's title. *Disco and Atomic War* will begin a theatrical run on November 12 at Cinema Village in New York, followed by a national release.

Middletown, the six-part documentary series produced by Peter Davis in the early 1980s, has been issued for the first time on DVD, in a box set from Icarus Films, and is now available for leisurely, concentrated study of some unchanging realities in American life. Inspired by Robert and Helen Lynd's 1929 book of the same title, and filmed in Muncie, Indiana, where the Lynds conducted their work, Davis's *Middletown* looks closely, sympathetically and unsparingly at people engaged in politics (*The Campaign*, directed by Tom Cohen), sports (*The Big Game*, directed by E.J. Vaughn), churchgoing (*Community of Praise*, directed by Richard Leacock and Marisa Silver), work (*Family Business*, directed by Tom Cohen), an impending marriage (*Second Time Around*, directed by Davis and John Lindley) and high school life (*Seventeen*, directed by Joel DeMott and Jeff Kreines). What does it add up to? "A single word not only binds but flows like a rushing stream through all six films," Davis writes in his essay for the DVD release. "It is a peculiarly American word that seems to apply to us as it would not if a similar study were made in Italy, China or even among our cultural progenitors in the British Isles. The word is *wanting*." Trust me: you want *Middletown*. ■

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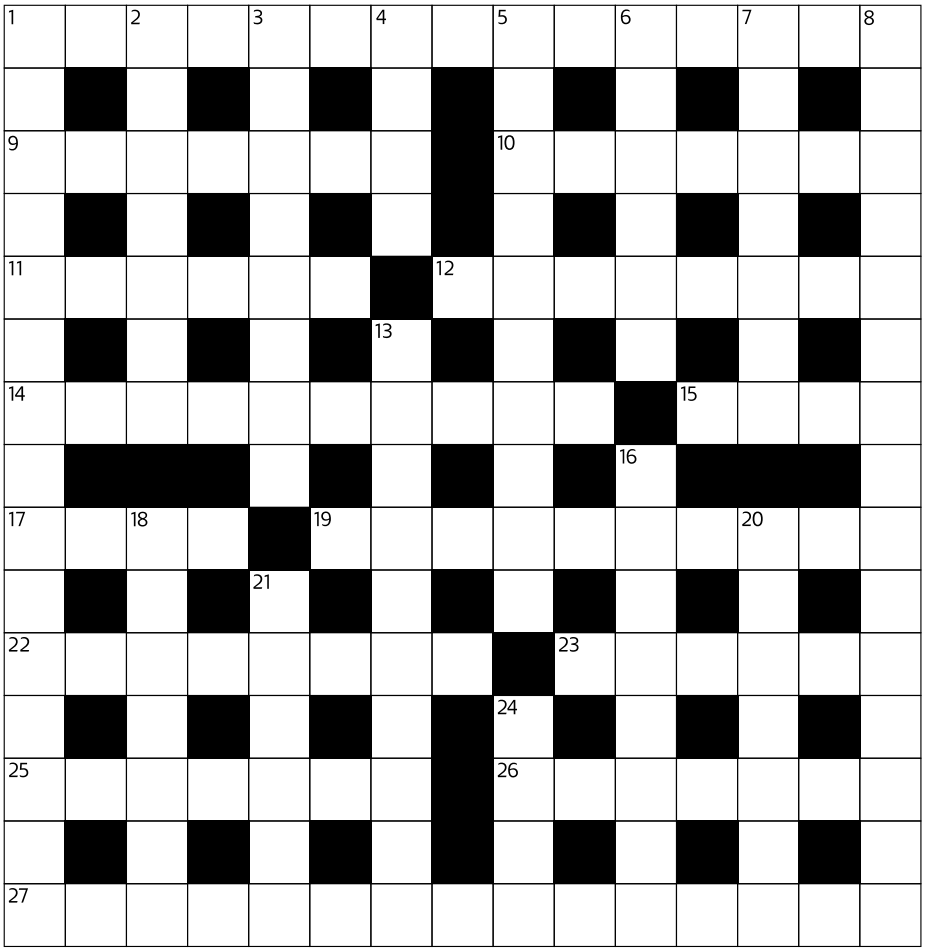

ACROSS

1 As old Marley was to begin a favorite Carol? (4,2,1,8)

9 Similar to a mimic? (7)

10 One doesn't reputedly make a summer drink this way. (7)

11 To tear to pieces in turn? (6)

12 Snow-bound writer. (8)

14 They might be crossed at entrances. (10)

15 Have an inclination to be other than fat? (4)

17 24 down obviously makes money! (4)

19 They couldn't have more than nine commandments left to break! (10)

22 Treated like a king. (8)

23 Genus of the carrot and hemlock family as an ingredient of Rose's Elixir. (6)

25 Going by what you already know, this ill-fitting pair took Rio by storm. (1,6)

26 Not a nice word to apply to one in the building brotherhood! (7)

27 A sign that someone is against the Wearing of the Green? (4,3,3,5)

DOWN

1 Help to get it up with a rigorously discriminating grade—it might be attached to a letter. (11,4)

2 The kind of man Gunga Din was might be of some aid. (7)

3 It might be for gold. (4,4)

4 Tools about which things might 11. (4)

5 Early and late, one isn't this. (2,8)

6 They might 11 with spit. (6)

7 Exceeding all others in past history. (3-4)

8 Drop down on the target. (5,4,6)

13 Does it involve having courage enough to do away with investment? Things stand out in it. (4,6)

16 Getting even? (8)

18 Attila was one of God, but beat. (7)

20 They sang about her as being dear and sweet. (7)

21 Miss Novak has on nothing but a loose robe! (6)

24 This writer sounds as though he'd either have to serve at court or be burnt! (4)

This puzzle originally appeared in the November 22, 1975, issue.

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 1607

	A	P	R	I	L	F	O	O	L	S	D	A	Y	
S		L		M		E		R		A		M		V
T	R	A	M	P	L	E		A	F	F	A	B	L	E
O		I		O		B		T		E		U		R
C	O	N	T	R	A	L	T	O		T	A	L	L	Y
K				T		E		R		Y		A		
I	N	P	L	A	Y		P	I	N	I	O	N	E	D
N		L		N		I		O		N		C		I
G	R	A	N	T	I	N	G		I	N	D	E	N	T
		S		P		C		S		U				H
L	E	T	H	E		U	N	T	A	M	A	B	L	E
O		E		R		B		R		B		R		R
N	E	R	I	S	S	A		O	P	E	R	A	T	E
G		E		O		T		L		R		V		D
	O	R	A	N	G	E	B	L	O	S	S	O	M	

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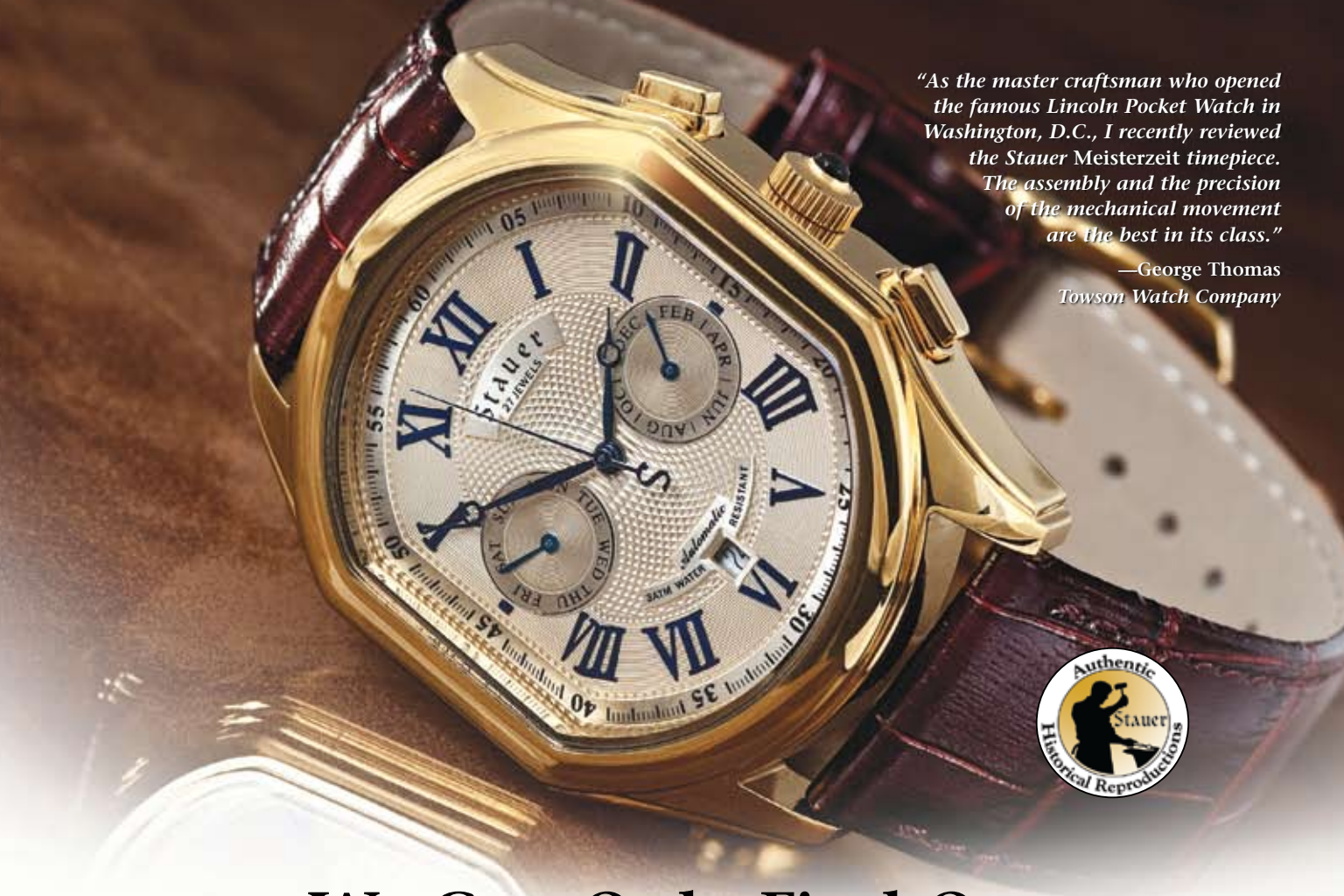

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